SEVERAL LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA

MY SHORT TIME AS A SUBMARINE SAILOR

DONALD WHEELER

Several Leagues Under the Sea

My short time as a Submarine sailor

By Donald Wheeler

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To Janie, who bore the brunt of our navy years.

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Preface

If you're looking for a rousing sea adventure, this ain't it. Instead, this little book is a reminiscence of an early part of my life and a glimpse of what it was like to serve on a diesel submarine as an enlisted man during the cold war period of the mid 60's. It's as accurate as I could make it considering it all happened over 50 years ago. Sadly, I have forgotten the names of most of my shipmates, so you won't see many. You can forget a lot in that length of time. However, the things that I say happened, really did occur. You won't see many numbers. If you really want to know the diameter of a torpedo tube, that information is readily available elsewhere. Most people couldn't care less. I hope you find the book an enjoyable read. There was no ghost writer. Anything you don't like is entirely my fault.

How it Came About

In the spring of 1961 I was 21 and in my final semester at Fullerton Junior College in Fullerton, California. In a few weeks I would have my AA degree in technical electronics and be ready to start my career and married life. Janie and I had known each other since my folks moved two doors down from hers when I was eleven years old. She was the neighborhood tomboy who could out run, out throw and out fight any kid on the block. I was a nerd who would rather play with my Erector set or microscope. Somehow, we hit it off. We had been dating for the last five years, and with a full time job we could finally tie the knot.

Graduation also meant I would lose my S2 draft deferment. That was something I didn't look forward to. Being a soldier was not number one on my bucket list. At that time the U.S. was pretty much at peace, but who knew what the future might bring. As it turned out, in a few years it brought a lot.

I was walking to class one day and noticed a poster. The gist of it was that there was a Navy submarine reserve unit that was looking for recruits. And those interested were welcome to join a bus load of others and spend a day at Terminal Island Navy base in Long Beach. Free lunch was included. Who knew there was such a thing as a submarine reserve? I went for it.

Well, the tour was OK. They showed us the reserve center in a big old hangar at the far end of the base, and we walked through the USS

Roncador, a WWII submarine that was there for reserve use. I was impressed. There's something about submarines. It just looked so cool.

They fed us in the base mess hall, which wasn't bad, and later asked us to take a multiple choice test. I did pretty well and an officer gave me a serious sales pitch. The deal was, you were obligated for six years. But, only two of those years were active duty. Three years were reserve duty with monthly weekends and an annual two week cruise, and one year was standby reserve, which only required you to let them know where you were and maintain your uniform. The clincher was that you could serve the reserve time first. That sounded pretty good to me. And, they would pay you to do it. In fact, when on active duty, you would get $55 a month extra hazardous duty pay.

So, I graduated and landed a good job as an electronic technician with North American Aviation. And, in August I and a room full of other guys had our physicals and were sworn in. There was something about giving your life for your country that I wasn't crazy about, but I swore anyway. Then they issued us a sea bag full of clothes, including dress blues, undress blues, dress whites, undress whites, dungarees, P coat, shoes (high top and oxford), and white hats. For some reason, I also got a blue wool Donald Duck type flat hat which probably hadn't been in use since WWI.

Reserve Duty

In September Janie and I were married, and a couple weeks later she dropped me off at Long Beach Airport and I was off to serve my first two weeks of active duty. I had flown once before briefly in small private plane, but this was my first experience in a commercial airliner. It was a Lockheed Electra turbo prop, and I got a window seat right next to the wing where I could see the huge paddle blades. I loved the flight. The stewardess gave me a soft drink and I watched the San Joaquin valley pass by from 30,000 feet.

As we approached San Francisco, we passed through a cloud layer. Everything went grey outside, and I figured if I couldn't see anything, neither could the pilot. A few minutes later, we came out of it, and there was water below, and it looked pretty close. And, it got closer and closer and I got a little nervous. But, the pilot knew what he was doing and we landed at San Francisco International Airport as smooth as silk.

A Navy driver came to pick me up at the airport and before long I was at Hunter's Point Navy base and shipyard. I was there for a combination

boot camp and submarine school. Actually, I think the main purpose was to weed out the ones they didn't want. There was one guy who grabbed at another guy's privates in the shower. The next day he had a shiner and then he was gone. There was no yelling and there were no physical drills like real boot camp. It was really mostly classroom lectures and study. They did take us to a pool on Treasure Island to see if we could swim, and we had to jump off a 20 foot high platform with a life jacket on. Twenty feet is a long way when you are looking at the bottom of the pool. Some guys had to be physically encouraged to make the jump. I forgot to keep my body straight and landed on my butt. They also put us in a decompression chamber and pumped it up to simulate about 50 feet of water depth, which made us all sound like chipmunks. This proved two things; that we could compensate our ears for pressure, and that we didn't suffer from claustrophobia. It was pretty cozy in there.

We bunked on the ground floor of an old two story wooden barracks. On the floor above was the crew of a Chilean sub that was in for some work. They were a pretty wild bunch and we could hear them stomping or maybe dancing in the evening. Their cooks helped out in the mess hall and we got a sample of Chilean cuisine, which was really good. I missed Janie a lot, but the two weeks went fast and I was soon free to enjoy civilian life again. I was now somewhat familiar with the Bluejacket's manual, and I had a basic knowledge of submarine construction.

I don't remember much about reserve meetings because to be honest, not much happened. On one of my early weekends we spent a day aboard an operational boat. I wish I could recall which one, but it's lost in the rat's nest of my memory. They took us out and did some dives and we took turns on the helm and bow and stern planes and standing lookout. And we ate submarine chow for lunch. And then it got rough. My strongest recollection of that is of sitting in the after torpedo room with the smell of hydraulic fluid and diesel fuel, and feeling the stern of the boat doing figure eights. Rolling, I can take. It's the raising and dropping that got to me. I was beginning to think maybe I made a big mistake. But, I hung in there.

Reserve meetings were pretty much a joke. I suppose there were some classes, but none that I recall. It was mostly sitting around bull shitting. One of the guys worked as a grip on porno movies, and he had some good stories. I wish I could remember them now. There was a big anti-aircraft gun inside the hanger, but we never got near it. One time they brought in a marine to teach us close order drill. The poor guy got pretty frustrated with this bunch of part time sailors. And once they took us down into an

underground concrete shooting range to familiarize us with the 45 caliber service pistol. It's the only time in the Navy that I fired a weapon, and I doubt whether I even hit the back wall. It really kicked. Ear plugs? We don't need no stinking ear plugs. What did you say? One weekend they let us each try handling a Higgins boat, a small landing craft, the kind with a ramp on the front. It had nothing to do with being a submarine sailor, but it was fun.

For a while there was a TBM Avenger torpedo bomber parked next to the hangar. It had a little door in the side near the tail. I opened it up and peeked inside one day. There was a tiny space, just big enough for a man to squeeze into and some radio equipment. There was a small window on each side. I can't imagine what it must have been like to be in there during a torpedo run. Five out of six of these guys were lost at the battle of Midway.

Janie and I moved to the city of Orange to be closer to my work, and the drive to Terminal Island was a drag. It was about thirty miles. And in those days it was mostly surface streets, mainly Garden Grove boulevard. As I crossed the steel bridge to Terminal Island, I could smell it before I could see it. There was a weird sweet smell that hit you when you approached. I was told it was copra, or dried coconut. I believe we were supposed to be there by eight and we could leave at five, so at least I got to come home Saturday night.

My next two week active duty came in January of 1963. They sent me to San Diego for two weeks aboard the USS Pomfret, SS391. This time Janie dropped me off at the Santa Ana train depot. The train was not nearly as much fun as the plane ride. After getting off in San Diego, I took a bus to Ballast Point.

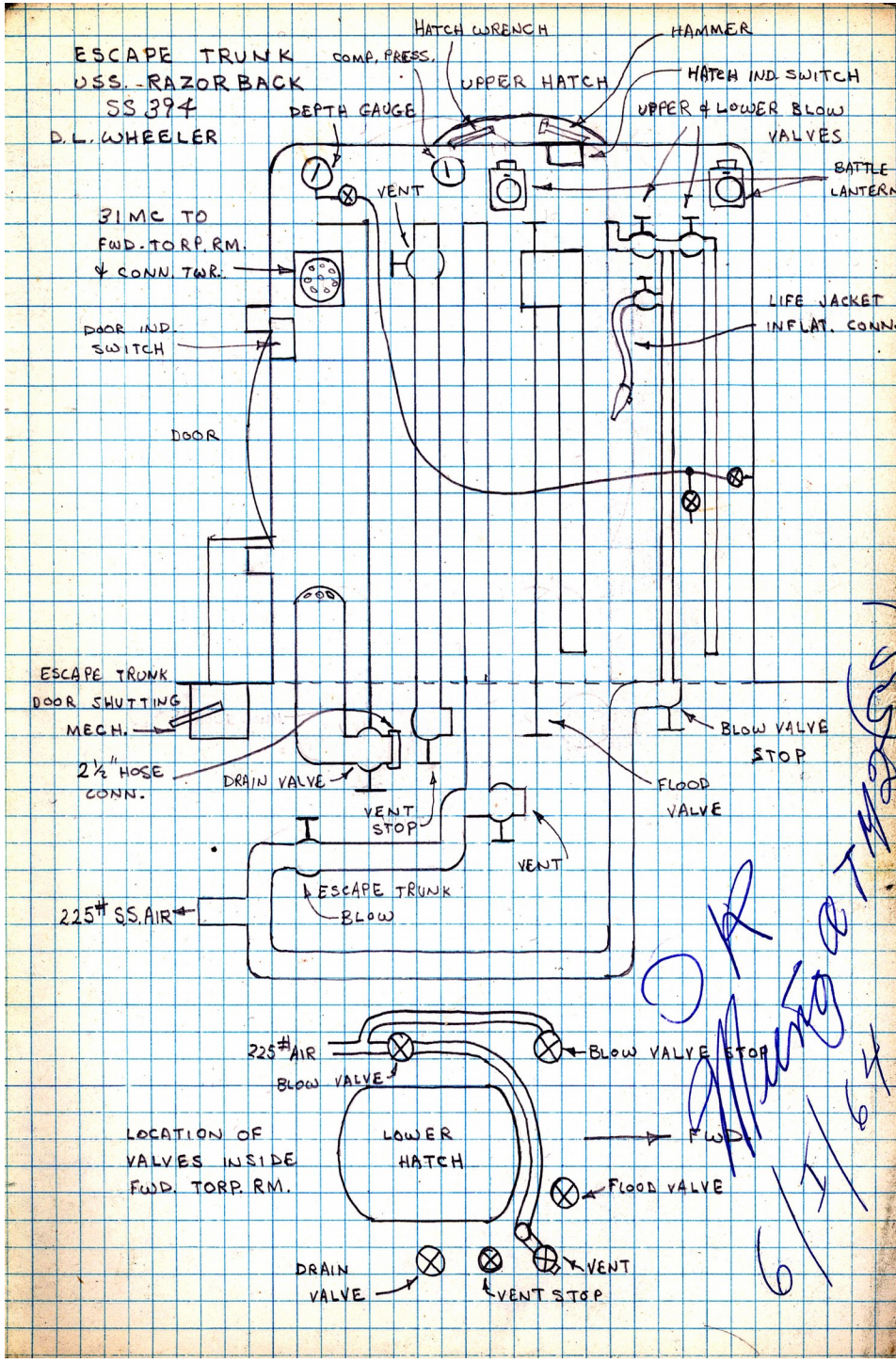
Ballast Point Submarine base is one of the few places I spent time at in the navy that is still there. The Long Beach and Hunter's Point bases are long gone. Long Beach is all container shipping now, and I think they're still trying to figure out what to do with Hunter's Point. Ballast Point is right at the entrance of San Diego Bay, across from the Naval air station on Coronado Island. It's a small base. At that time there were just a few old buildings and a couple piers. Tied up at the piers were two submarine tenders. The subs were tied up alongside the tenders in nests. This meant to reach an outboard boat you had to cross the tender and several other boats. Normally, when you go aboard a Navy ship you salute the flag at the stern and the watch and ask permission to come aboard. I remember doing that for the tender and the Pomfret, but I don't recall if I had to when

just walking across another boat.

The first night aboard I had no bunk. Submarine bunks had a zippered plastic cover called a flash cover, and I spent the night shivering in my clothes on top of one in the after battery compartment. The COB, that's Chief of the Boat, took pity on me and after that I was assigned a bunk. As luck would have it, I arrived two weeks before their annual inspection, and I spent most of the time cleaning and polishing. We didn't even go to sea. But, I got a few things signed off and the captain wrote me a letter of commendation. I still have it. He wrote that he appreciated my can-do attitude.

My next and last two week cruise was in May of 1964. This time I went aboard the USS Razorback, SS394. And, it was actually a pretty good two weeks. We went to sea and I got some real operating experience. I worked hard on my qualifying and got a lot of things signed off. As a side note, the Razorback was eventually sold to Turkey. And, in 2004 it was purchased by the city of Little Rock Arkansas and towed there. It is now a museum display.

I should explain qualifying. In order to serve on a sub, you have to qualify. And, it's not easy. You have to know what every valve and lever on the boat does, where it is, and how to use it, and there are a lot of them. So, you take one system at a time and trace out and sketch the lines. Then you walk through the boat with a senior qualified crew member and he checks you out. When you have completed all systems, an officer walks you through for a final test. If you pass, you get an SS added to your rate and get to wear a dolphins pin on your uniform. You have nine months after reporting aboard to make it. After that, it's an automatic transfer to surface duty. Here is a sample page from my qualifying work book. It's the Razorback escape trunk in the forward torpedo room.


ESCAPE TRUNK
USS. - RAZOR BACK
SS 394
D. L. WHEELER
HATCH WRENCH
HAMMER
COMP. PRESS.
UPPER HATCH
HATCH IND. SWITCH
DEPTH GAUGE
UPPER & LOWER BLOW VALVES
VENT
BATTLE LANTERN
31 MC TO FWD. TORP. RM. & CONN. TWR.
LIFE JACKET INFLAT. CONN.
DOOR IND. SWITCH
DOOR
ESCAPE TRUNK DOOR SHUTTING MECH.
2½" HOSE CONN.
DRAIN VALVE
VENT STOP
VENT
FLOOD VALVE
BLOW VALVE STOP
ESCAPE TRUNK BLOW
225# S.S. AIR
225# AIR
BLOW VALVE
BLOW VALVE STOP
LOCATION OF VALVES INSIDE FWD. TORP. RM.
LOWER HATCH
FWD
FLOOD VALVE
DRAIN VALVE
VENT STOP
VENT

Active Duty

In August of 1964, my active duty came due. This was not a happy time. I had done well at North American and had been promoted to the title of advanced technical personnel. Essentially, I was an engineer in an engineering group doing manufacturing test support. I had all the benefits and duties of an engineer, but I was still on the time clock. Life was good.

Janie and I had discussed whether we should try for a child before or after my active duty. She decided she wanted the baby before, and in February of '64 our first son Jeffrey was born. So now I not only would be separated from her, but my son too. But, you do what you have to do.

Janie dropped me off with my sea bag at the Terminal Island gate and drove back to our apartment in Orange. I reported to the reserve center. The duty officer checked my orders and got me into a conversation. And, I got my first active duty lesson. He asked me something casually, and I made the mistake of saying yeah. Man, did he flip out! “You say yes sir to an officer! You could go to the brig for that!” In hindsight, he was doing me a favor. But, at the time I just considered him an asshole. Welcome to the archaic class society of the armed forces, Wheeler. I have to say, though, I never had any problems with an officer during the rest of my active duty. I may have even said yeah a couple of times.

I lugged my sea bag over to the regular check-in office where they went over my orders again. They asked some questions, one of which was “Can you type?” Well, I took typing in junior high, but I could only do about 8 words a minute, so I said not really. Big mistake. Instead of a soft job, I found myself picking up butts on the grounds, cleaning toilets, painting barracks, and waxing floors. Later I watched some guy picking out letters with one finger typing liberty cards. After a few days my new orders came through and I was assigned to the U.S.S. Diodon, SS349 in San Diego. It's one of those strange coincidences that make you wonder if somebody is pulling the strings. I had worked in department 349 at North American. Anyway, Janie picked me up and I was soon on my way to Ballast Point. Diodon was a WWII era diesel boat. She was launched in 1945 right at the end of the war and saw no action in it. By the time I served, she had been modified and updated a couple of times and was what they called a Guppy II conversion. Guppy stands for Greater Underwater Propulsion Power. One of the changes was that the sail, what most people call the conning tower, was now a tall fiberglass structure. Here she is in the official souvenir photo I purchased while I served on her.

In case you're wondering, Diodon is a species of fish, also known as the Porcupinefish. They're not the biggest fish in the ocean, but still not to be messed with. They have beak like jaws, are covered with spines and puff up when threatened. According to an article in Wikipedia, they can choke a shark to death, or even eat their way out after being swallowed.

Of course I'm biased, but I think she was a neat looking thing. The bridge was right on top of the sail, and it was a great place to watch the waves go by. The windows below it were on a free flooding observation deck that I never saw used for that purpose. Some of the Guppys had a stepped sail made of Aluminum, and their bridge was about half way up and had a spherical windshield in front. The forward deck was free flooding teak wood strips. The after deck was perforated metal with hinged fiberglass sections called clam shells on either side. Below the deck, was the long cylindrical pressure hull. When I reported aboard, she had 4 diesel engines driving generators, and two electric motors direct coupled to twin screws.

None of the Guppys had deck guns. It was determined long ago that that was a poor weapon for a submarine. A sub's only real defense, is to remain undetected.

During my reserve time I had worked my way up in rank from seaman

recruit to seaman by way of correspondence courses and tests. And, I had already taken and passed the test for ETR3, which stands for electronic technician radar, third class. Within two weeks of coming aboard, my paperwork came through and I became a third class petty officer. This meant I was only part of the seaman gang for a couple of weeks. But, I did get to assist in loading torpedoes once. I was given a line to hold and told to stay out of the way, which I was happy to do. It also meant I was exempt from serving mess duty, which was also fine by me.

I also did some line handling the first time we went to sea. I was stationed on the port side just forward of the sail. There was a hatch in the deck with a tub underneath for line storage. My job was to haul in the line and stow it. No problem. Well, the line was released from the boat next to us, and I started to haul it in. Now when a boat backs out of the nest into the main channel, it gives three blasts of its whistle to warn oncoming traffic. The whistle, which is really an air horn of the type used on locomotives, was located about knee high on the front of the sail, about ten feet behind me. That thing went off, and I about jumped overboard. I'm sure the guys on the bridge had a good laugh. By the way, you don't coil the line, you just dump it in and it comes out with no kinks the next time you need it. The line was soft braided nylon about one inch in diameter. I was told that it was like a big rubber band and that if snapped could cut a man in two.

And, I learned to throw a heaving line. We called it a heevy as in heave ho. This was light cotton line about like clothes line with a ball on the end. The ball was weighted and wrapped in cord in a pattern that was called a monkey fist. The monkey fist was an example of fancy work which you see a lot of in the Navy on stanchions and other objects. Often it's covered with several coats of paint. I suspect you have to know how to do it to be a boatswain's mate. (pronounced bosun's mate) Anyway, to throw it you hang on to the end and coil the line loosely in one hand. Then you swing the monkey fist around with the other hand and let it fly. Somebody on the dock or other boat would grab the line and tie it to a heavier line that you could then pull across and use for mooring.

The senior ET at the time was a fellow whose last name ended in ski. So, obviously that's what he was called. There was a sonarman named Frost, who was Frosty and I became Wheels. I had worked on radar as a civilian, and the SS radar on the boat was pretty basic. So, it was a piece of cake to become familiar with. Ski was great and I fit right in. Things were looking up.

You might think that being a reserve I would be teased or given a hard

time. I hadn't gone through regular boot camp or submarine school like everyone else. But, that wasn't the case at all. I saw some teasing, but I don't recall ever being the target of it. Right from the start I felt fully accepted. It could have had something to do with my age. I was 25, as old as some of the officers and senior enlisted. Or, it might have been because I tried really hard to fit in. Now as I think about it, there might have been other reservists aboard. If there were, I was never aware of it.

The fact that I had a college degree and had worked in an engineering department for a major defense contractor might have made some impression on the officers and chiefs, but most of the crew couldn't have cared less.

The yeoman's name was Thompson. I think he had a photographic memory. He knew the service number of every man aboard. When he was doing some paperwork on me he asked if I knew any foreign languages. I said I had one semester of German in college and two semesters of Spanish in high school. He said “Good, you are a translator.” I said “Wait a minute, I can't translate those languages.” He said, “Could you do it with a dictionary?” I said “Well, yes I suppose.” He said “Good enough.” So, somewhere in my records it says I am a translator. Luckily, I never had to prove it.

Moving Day

Janie wanted to move to San Diego so we could see more of each other, and it wasn't long before we were apartment hunting. We were very lucky to find a nice unfurnished duplex in Pacific Beach for $95 a month. Actually, it was two duplexes facing each other with a fenced in yard between. It was just a few miles from Ballast Point and five blocks from the beach, and just a short walk from basic shopping. That was our home for the duration of my active duty.

Moving was a bit of a hassle. Before I went active, I had a mechanic go over our little Ford Falcon. I wanted to make sure it would be trouble free for Janie. As part of the work, he did a valve job. Unfortunately, he wasn't that sharp on the Falcon engine and he installed something wrong, which prevented the valves from getting proper lubrication. It ran fine until we got almost to San Diego with a trailer full of furniture. Luckily, I somehow made it to a Ford dealer who was able to get us going again.

The trailer was rented, and the guy who rented it to us hooked it up. We were returning to our old place for the rest of our stuff when I was pulled over by a Highway Patrolman. I had been doing 60mph on the freeway

and didn't realize the limit for towing a trailer was 55. Then, when he checked the trailer hitch he found that it wasn't secured correctly. So, I ended up with a traffic citation. Something we really didn't need at the time.

The duplex didn't come with a stove, and we didn't have one. Our last apartment had a built in. So, we visited a local used furniture store and bought a filthy old stove for $25. It wasn't until I cleaned it up that we found the oven didn't work. So, we returned it nice and clean and bought a new stove at Sears with our credit card.

Speaking of credit cards, there was a Texaco gas station near us and I applied for a credit card. I was turned down, apparently because I was a sailor. I never bought anything from Texaco from that time on.

Local Operations

As I wrote earlier, Ballast Point is right at the tip of Point Loma and sits at the mouth of San Diego bay. Just across the water is North Island Naval Air Station. It was a common occurrence to see fighters kick in their afterburners right over us as they took off. If you are ever in San Diego, I highly recommend the drive out to the tip of the point pass the military cemetery and up to the lighthouse. The view of the sub base and North Island is well worth it.

The two tenders were the USS Sperry and USS Nereus. It seems like there were about a dozen boats tied up next to them at any one time. They had machine shops, storage compartments and everything needed to support the boats, plus showers and a barber shop. The barbers weren't the best, but they were fast, and it was free. Once, in a dumb move, I let the ship's cook cut my hair at sea. When we got in, a tender barber tried to patch it up. It was kind of short for a while, but it grew out and the barbers got a chuckle.

It was on the Sperry that I discovered something called officer's country. It was actually posted. And, if you were an enlisted man, you didn't go there unless you were called. There was nothing like that on the boats. There couldn't be. The only passageway went right between the captain's quarters and the wardroom.

It was said that the tenders had been there so long that they were frozen to the bottom due to trash being thrown overboard. I suspect that was an exaggeration. Their sewer line ran down the side and stopped a few feet above the water and was continuously flowing. A school of little fish was

always under it waiting for goodies. I remember one day seeing a guy standing on a raft trying to smack them with a boat oar. There's a saying in the Navy; “A bored sailor is a dangerous thing.” Another saying is: “There's nothing salt water or a sailor can't foul up.” Well, foul isn't the exact word, but you get the idea.

Yes, in those days raw sewage went right into San Diego bay. Ours was held in a tank called sanitary and it was blown overboard regularly. If you were top side, you would know it by the smell when they vented the tank. There was a saying that if you were to route the sanitary tank vent through the ships whistle, it would sound like a fart. I don't believe that's even possible, but I wouldn't swear to it.

And, speaking of smells, the diesel boats had there own eau de cologne. Coming aboard you would be struck by the faint whiff of diesel fuel and hydraulic oil. It seemed most everything was controlled by hydraulics, the planes, steering, vent and flood valves, and lines ran everywhere. The auxiliarymen kept leaks pretty much under control and the air conditioning helped, but still there was the smell. The funny thing was, after a short time you didn't even notice it. But, Janie did when I'd bring my dirty clothes home to be washed. When I got out, I kept a set of dungarees in my old bunk bag for years in the attic. Even after 10 or 15 years, I could open that bag and smell the boat.

Did I say air conditioning? Yes, the air conditioning was excellent. However, it wasn't there for our comfort. That was just a pleasant side effect. The real reason was to keep the all important electrical circuits dry.

Since it was peace time, the boats spent most of the time tied up. Operations could be anywhere from one to several days and consisted of training exercises with the fleet. We were mostly targets for anti-submarine units. But sometimes we were allowed to do make-believe attacks on surface ships. This usually involved firing water slugs. The tubes were flooded with no torpedo and fired normally. You could feel the jolt throughout the boat when they did. Occasionally we'd fire a practice torpedo. These had no warhead and would bob to the surface for recovery at the end of a run. The surface ships carried ASROC's, anti submarine rockets that were similar in function. One of the boats came in with one stuck in it's sail.

We carried three types of torpedoes. The Mark 14 was the classic steam powered type that burned alcohol. The alcohol was called pink lady because it had an additive to make it poisonous. This was for obvious reasons. Another type used hydrogen peroxide as a propellant. The third

type was electric and wire guided. When fired, the wire trailed out behind it and it could be controlled for much of its run. I heard that there were actually nuclear tipped torpedoes and that there was always an armed guard on board with them. But, that may have been a sea story.

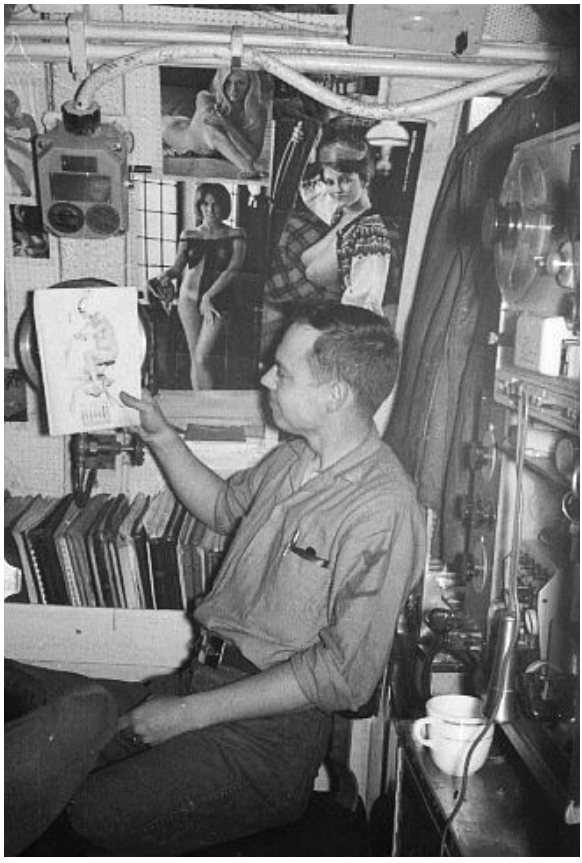
For a while I had an interesting battle station. The partition between the wardroom and the passageway could drop down revealing a clear plexiglass window. On the window was scribed a radial pattern with the center representing our boat. Inside the wardroom sat a plotting party. My task was to stand in the passageway with a headset on and draw contacts on the window with a grease pencil. If there were numbers or letters I would write them backwards to be readable from the wardroom side. I found this surprisingly easy to do. It was actually fun. Eventually, my station was the radar console which was cool because I was right next to the periscopes.

One time we took a bunch of Marines on board from Camp Pendleton. We were to drop them off in rubber inflatable rafts at night for a beach assault and pick them up later. I could see in these guys' eyes that they were a little nervous about it, and I didn't blame them. A couple of Navy seals went along as life guards. It went OK except for one of the boats being punctured by an errant bayonet. At least everyone got back on board safely. The seals were really big guys.

At sea I stood radar and sonar watches. The radar console was located in the conning tower inside the sail. It was against the starboard bulkhead near the periscopes and the navigators station. You stood next to it, and there were two hand rails on it to hang on to in rough seas. It had a choice of two antennas. One was the standard shell shape atop the sail, which was used for general navigation and search. The other one was a tiny port in the attack periscope. During an attack, the watch officer would say mark, and I would fire the radar just long enough to get a range on a target. The console had a large red pilot light. This was during the time when the Batman TV show was popular. I cut out a black bat pattern and stuck it inside the light. It was a goofy thing to do, but if any officer or chief noticed it they must have considered it harmless. No one said anything about it.

When the radar wasn't needed, I stood sonar watches. The sonarmen and E.T.'s worked pretty closely. Usually there were two or three of each aboard. Some boats had the sonar room in a compartment below the control room. Ours was in the forward torpedo room, and a lot more convenient. There was just enough room for two seats and consoles, one for active and one for passive sonar. The active was rarely used, so it was

mostly scanning and listening. Here is a photo of me in the sonar room. Playboy magazine was popular with the guys.



In modern boats there is equipment to analyze and identify contacts by their sound. Not on the Diodon. It was strictly a matter of operator skill. They sent me to a one week C school to learn the tricks, but I was never very good at it. If I heard anything, I turned it over to a real sonarman. A lot of what we heard were natural noises, like the crackling of snapping shrimp and the clicks and squeals of dolphins. I regret that I never got to hear the sound of whales. That would have been cool.

During exercises we could sometimes hear helicopters hovering over us. And, if they dropped sonobuoys in the water you could here them ping. I hated when we got caught. You could hear the screws of the destroyers going over even without the sonar. Then they would drop practice depth charges and we'd get a bang in our ears. The word was that these were hand grenades wrapped in toilet paper.

I was in the conn during an exercise and the underwater telephone was on. There were dolphins in the area and we could hear their clicks and squeals. For some dumb reason I pressed the transmit lever and said “Any dolphin any dolphin, this is Diodon over.” A voice came back immediately with “Diodon, this is any dolphin. Go ahead, over.” Apparently, we were well within range of a surface ship. I didn't have guts enough to answer.

Once I was helping one of the sonarmen troubleshoot a problem. He had opened up one of the consoles in the forward torpedo room. The console contained some large high voltage capacitors and standard procedure was to touch them with a grounding probe to make sure they were safe before working inside. The probe was a plastic stick about three feet long. There was a metal tip connected to a metal braid that ended in a large alligator clip that was clipped to the console frame. Well, Frosty, the sonarman touched that tip to one of the capacitors and there was a bang like a shotgun being fired. The metal braid totally disintegrated and tiny pieces of it were imbedded in his clothes and face. Luckily, he wore glasses that protected his eyes. There was a Filipino steward sleeping in a sky rack just behind us and he flew out of it like the devil was after him. It was funny because no one was hurt. But, it could have been bad. It turned out the bleeder resistor on the capacitor had failed.

I attended a few other C schools too. These were local short classes of specific electronic equipment. At one, by the coffee urn was a hand written sign that said “no sugar, no cream, no ants.” I learned to like black coffee in the Navy.

When in port, in addition to a duty officer, there were two watch duties, below decks and topside. The below decks watch did safety checks, blew the sanitary tank when needed, woke up replacement watches, and made the first pot of coffee in the morning. He had to be qualified. Since I wasn't, I stood topside watches. This meant standing in front of the sail next to the gangplank in uniform of the day and keeping a log. It seems to me that it was a two hour watch, but I wouldn't swear to it now. You weren't allowed to smoke, but chewing was OK. This led to my first and only try with chewing tobacco. I bought a pouch of Redman. It tasted good, but I swallowed just enough of it to get sick. At sea, watches were four hours on and eight off with three watch sections.

Once, there was a rumor that Navy frogmen were going to try to sneak up on us at night. So, for a while seamen stood watches on the stern with a rifle. I think the idea was to show that we were being alert. No one ever saw a frogman.

Here is a story I heard, but can't verify. A Turkish boat tied up for a while, and one of their guys went AWOL. They caught him and brought him back, and his captain wanted to hang him. Our command said no way. So, they went to sea one day and came back without him. The Turks apparently don't mess around.

Here's a story I can verify. One of the guys was going on leave. He had his dress blues on and sea bag packed. He was pushing it up the after battery hatch and asked a guy topside to give a hand. Well, he asked the wrong person. The kid on deck asked "What do you want me to do with it?" It was such a dumb question that he answered jokingly, "Oh, just toss it overboard." That's just what the kid did. Luckily, it floated long enough for someone to pull it out with a boat hook. I can't remember the final outcome of this, but I know it really happened because I watched the guy rinse out his camera with fresh water in the head basin. You have to be careful who you joke with.

A Boomer, a ballistic missile boat, tied up once. It was huge. I would have loved to walk through it, but didn't get the chance. We had some Nuclear fast attack boats too. They had power to burn. When they headed out, their screw would create a rooster tail about fifteen feet high.

Being a petty officer didn't excuse me from housekeeping chores. I mostly remember being on my hands and knees scrubbing the control room deck with a sponge, a copper Brillo pad, scouring powder, and a number ten can of water. Sweeping was done with a side handle brush we called a fox tail. Once, I wiped down the stainless steel shower with pink lady, the alcohol used to fuel torpedoes. I got bit of a buzz from that.

I also helped load stores. The com system in all compartments would announce "Now all hands second class and below lay to to load stores" and off we'd go to the tender to bring back supplies. The tender had one compartment full of nothing but cigarettes. It had a nice sweet smell. They were called sea store cigarettes. There was no tax on them and I believe they were about fifteen cents a pack. It's no wonder most of the guys were smokers. I kept my smoking to a few cigars and my pipe. I liked mild Dutch Cavendish tobacco. We had a fellow from Wyoming who always carried a can of snuff in his back pocket. There was a white ring on his dungarees where the material over it had been worn.

Once they sent some of us over to a small warehouse on the base to pick up some stuff. I remember something that struck my eye. Blankets for enlisted men were plain gray wool. I noticed some officer's blankets on a shelf, soft, thick and white with blue trim. Rank has it's privileges in the

service.

I think there was a lot of waste. We received a cathode ray tube that didn't fit anything we had. I was told to toss it overboard. No one wanted to do the paperwork to try and return it. I couldn't bring myself to do that, so I sneaked it out in my ditty bag. It was a stupid thing to do, but I had this feeling that I might be able to do something with it some day. It was up in our garage rafters for years before I finally tossed it.

Tattoos weren't as big a deal in those days as they are now. But, some of the guys had them. One electrician had ship's screws tattooed on the cheeks of his butt. One was labeled hot and the other cold. I never had the urge to get one.

During my first year we made a cruise to San Francisco. As we approached the bay, the wind and sea were really kicking up. That big fiberglass sail really acts like a sail when the wind hits it from the side. During one blast, we took a roll of 45 degrees to port and hung there for several seconds. The bulkhead was at the same angle as the deck. I had serious concern that we would go right on over, but we didn't. There was a nuclear boat trailing us and I got to peek at it through the periscope. It was really rolling. The nukes aren't really designed for traveling on the surface.

We tied up at a pier near Fisherman's Wharf and had open house for the general public. It was fun watching people go through the boat. The most popular duty was standing at the bottom of the ladder helping the ladies come down. Curiously, we had to cover our depth gauges, even though any spy worth his salt would already know how deep we could dive. For the record, it was a touch over 400 ft.

Even though the fleet type diesel subs were called boats, they were actually pretty big, 310 feet. That's longer than a football field. And they displaced 1500 tons on the surface. So, they were pretty much comparable to a Destroyer. They were divided into nine watertight compartments: forward torpedo room, forward battery, control room, conning tower, after battery, forward engine room, after engine room, maneuvering room, and after torpedo room. Let me take you on a quick tour.

The forward torpedo room had six tubes, storage space for torpedoes, the sonar shack and sonar consoles, the officers' head and chain-hung racks for sleeping. The ones overhead were called sky racks. It also had an escape trunk that could be sealed off at the bottom and opened at the top for access to a rescue diving bell. There was a large buoy in the forward deck topside with a cable and phone line leading to the escape trunk. In an emergency, the buoy could be released and bob to the surface. The escape

trunk also had a side door and steps leading up to the deck. I think the trunk and buoy were more for morale than anything. Most of the ocean is too deep for them so they're only useful when close to shore. I'm not sure the newer boats even have them. There was also an angled hatch for loading torpedoes. You could see your reflection in the torpedo tube doors. They didn't start out like that. It took many hours of filing, sanding, and polishing by torpedo men to make and keep them that way. It was a point of pride that anything brass should be shiny. The Brasso company owes much to the U.S. Navy.

The officer's head had its own small sanitary tank. The stewards took care of blowing it. It vented inboard through a charcoal filter that was only marginally effective. In case you're wondering, officers' poop does stink.

The forward battery had, as you might expect, lead acid battery cells in its lower level. Above these were the captain's and executive officer's quarters, a tiny officer's pantry, the wardroom, the yeoman's office, and sleeping compartments for officers and senior chiefs. The officers' food was cooked in the main galley, but they ate in the wardroom. We had three or four Filipino stewards aboard who looked after the officers and fixed snacks for them.

When the batteries were being charged, they gave off hydrogen gas. This was sucked back into the engines and burned. There were hydrogen sensors in the battery compartment that were monitored. I was told of a case on another boat where something went wrong. The boat was tied up and the battery was being charged. The vent to the engines was left closed and hydrogen built up. Eventually, it ignited. The walking deck above was blown up against the curved pressure hull. And, there were men above that deck. A wrong setting on a valve or lever on a submarine can be deadly. Hence, there were strict rules for how things were done.

The control room was the center of operation. In the middle was a table containing the large gyro compass. The compass floated in a pool of mercury. Once, the compass was removed for some work and guys were throwing keys and coins in it to watch them float.

On the port side forward was the hydraulic manifold for operating ballast tank vents. It was normally manned by a chief. Aft of that were the bow and stern plane control wheels, manned by seaman who became lookouts when on the surface. A diving officer stood next to them and answered orders from the conn. Further aft, were the valves and controls to adjust water level in the trim tanks. These were tanks inside the pressure hull that water was pumped into and out of to maintain neutral buoyancy

and trim. An auxiliaryman usually manned them. One of the rules that was drilled into us was to never ever jam a valve fully open. Someone might want to know what state that valve is in. And, if it's jammed open they might think it was closed. I still follow this rule even when watering the lawn.

Also back in this corner were the ECM and loran recievers, which I had occasion to operate. ECM stands for electronic countermeasures. There was a special retractable mast for it. Loran stands for long range aid to navigation. It was used to pick up special signals from shore stations that allowed our position to be determined.

On the forward bulkhead was the console for the fathometer that measured how far above the bottom we were. Next to it was the auxiliary steering station. This was for emergency use only and I never saw it used. Along the starboard bulkhead were readouts for gas sensors, electrical switches and air valves for blowing the tanks. Centrally located was the ladder that led up to the conning tower and up to the bridge. At the aft end of the compartment was the radio shack. And, finally, below deck was the pump room which held the pumps and air compressors.

The speed that the radiomen could send and receive code was amazing. It sounded like a blur to me. One of them told me that it's like reading. You get so you don't hear individual letters, you hear words.

The after battery was divided into the galley, the crew's mess, the reefer, berthing area, crews head, basins and shower. There were two toilets. And, of course, below the deck were battery cells. There was a ladder and hatch in the mess area for going topside.

Each engine room contained two 16 cylinder diesel engines. These were basically the same type used in locomotives. I saw one of the pistons once and it was about the size of a trash can. They were started by compressed air, and cooled by sea water which sprayed out with the exhaust from large ports on either side of the boat. It was pretty deafening to be in the compartment when they were running, but a nice comforting rumble elsewhere. I loved the sound. Combine that with a gentle swell and it will rock you to sleep like your mother's arms.

The maneuvering room held the controls and switches for the two electric motors that were below the deck. The motors drove the twin screws directly with no gears to make noise. There was a cage for switches for each motor, and panels aft of them where two electricians manned the controls. I was told that if you did the wrong thing you could get fire balls inside those cages. I know the copper bars that carried the current were

huge. The shafts for the screws were made water tight with lignum vitae bearings. Lignum vitae is a very hard tropical wood.

The after torpedo room had 4 tubes. It also had an escape hatch. Well, theoretically you could escape. It didn't have a sealed trunk like the forward room, so you would have to flood the whole compartment to open it. And, there was no provision to attach a diving bell. There was also a toilet, but it had a tiny tank and had to be blown to sea after each use. It wasn't a simple flush. Under the torpedo room was what was at one time a ballast tank, number seven to be exact. But, it was found to be unnecessary for that function and had been converted to a storage compartment. It wasn't very tall though, so it was pretty much a crawl space. Lots of spare parts were stored in it.

The conning tower, or conn, was above the control room inside the sail. It was a cylindrical space with two watertight hatches. One to go below and one above to reach the interior of the sail. When the command was given to clear the bridge, the lookouts and watch officer would come sliding down ladders in these hatches, and you had better not be in the way. At the forward end was the helm. I can tell you that standing a helm watch was not much fun. You turn a big wheel to maintain a heading. If the sea is calm, there's nothing to do. If you have a following swell, there's too much to do. And, there's nothing to look at but the compass readout. But, if memory serves me well, the position is rotated with the lookouts during a watch. I was never at the helm when submerged, but I expect it was much easier.

Behind the helm were the two periscopes, one for general navigation and one narrower attack scope. I had many opportunities to look through the main periscope, and it was cool. Once, the watch officer let me look up at the underside of the surface as we cruised along at slightly below periscope depth. It's weird to see waves from underneath. By the way, on a submarine depth is measured from the keel. Normal periscope depth was about 62 feet.

On the port side of the conn was the fire control computer. It was not like any computer you would see today. It was all mechanical; motors, dials and gears. There were fire control technicians to maintain it. And, on the starboard side of this cozy chamber was the radar console where I spent a lot of time. It was chest height when standing and a pretty basic radar with one display screen.

At the aft end was the quartermaster's station, with a work surface for charts and storage for the charts and the ships chronometers. I believe

there were three so they could be checked against one another.

Up three ladders from the conn was the bridge. It was right at the top of the sail. When we were just cruising, anyone could go up and visit. All you had to do was stand at the bottom and yell “Permission to come up?” and the watch officer would respond with “Come up”. It was like riding a giant surf board up there, watching the bow slice through the waves. I loved it and went up often. The watch officer could call down and a steward would bring him coffee or juice. I heard a story that there was an officer who would chew out the steward if the cup wasn't totally full. Now, carrying a full cup up three ladders isn't easy. But, the steward figured out a way. He would take a swig at the bottom and spit it back just before getting to the top. Now I have to say, this has all the earmarks of a sea story, the Navy equivalent of an urban legend. So, I won't vouch for its veracity.

Maybe you've heard that submarine sailors eat well. That's no lie. On occasion, we had steak, trout, or lobster. And, the only time I've ever eaten frog legs was aboard the boat. There was a young guy from Ireland who thought that was disgusting. I thought they were pretty good. The good eats caused me much guilt. While I was eating high on the hog, Janie was trying to feed herself and Jeffrey on the pitiful amount of money I was making. I believe it came to about $350 a month. One instance that I cannot forget, I went to the market with her and we could only afford a piece of salt pork and some beans. She says she ate a lot of cereal. It's a crime that our service people aren't paid better. Janie received a monthly check for her allotment. My pay was in cash. I still carry a two dollar bill from it.

One of our cooks was a southern boy, and I learned to like grits. My second Captain was fond of curry. And, since the officers ate the same menu as we did, we had to have curry once a month. They always gave you two choices, but the alternative to curry was always liver and onions. I hated both. Our head cook was a first class who had once been a tank driver in the Army.

The mess area wasn't big enough for everyone, so there were three mess calls. The first included anyone going on watch. For each call, guys would line up in the berthing area passageway while the mess cooks set the tables. If we were at sea, they would lay down rubber netting so dishes wouldn't slide around. Milk was served in big metal pitchers and the nearest person would grab and brace them as needed. If we were at sea for a while, the milk was from condensed. Most dishes were just set out on the tables to be passed around. But, with something like steaks or eggs, you

could get them done the way you wanted by passing your plate into the galley. The stewards would pick up food for the officers and take it to the wardroom.

When at sea, there was midrats at midnight. This was usually soup and sandwiches. The lunchmeat came unsliced and was referred to as horse cock. I learned some colorful language in the navy.

The sinks were on the starboard bulkhead and next to them was a container for each guy to dump any leftovers in. Wasting food is strongly discouraged in the Navy. When at sea, all trash was put in special net bags with a weight in the bottom and ejected by a special little torpedo tube.

When not being used for eating, the mess area was used for general recreation. There was a TV set, and 16mm movies were shown in the evenings. It was also used for church services for those inclined. And, you could just sit down, have some coffee, play games, study, read, or just shoot the breeze. When in port, anyone could fix a snack for themselves in the evening. Popcorn and icecream were popular. The mess cooks slept in two special bunks right next to the mess area and the reefers. There weren't enough bunks for everyone, so some of the lower rates had to hot bunk. That's another term for taking turns. Our total crew, including officers was about 80 men.

High on the forward bulkhead in the mess area was a big shortwave receiver. It looked like had been there since the war. That was something I had yearned for since I was a kid, but never could afford. I would have loved to have taken it home. I don't know if it was even connected to an antenna, and I never saw it turned on. I don't think any of my shipmates cared about listening to shortwave.

Submarine sailors came in all sizes; tall, short, fat and skinny. I was a skinny 5' 11" 130 pounds when I came aboard. Because of all the good food, there was a tendency for guys to put on weight. At the end of my tour of duty I was up to 150 pounds. While I was in, the Navy came out with some guidelines that strongly recommended that the troops should shape up. Some of the heavy guys tried. One big torpedoman brought aboard some diet drink that you were supposed to have instead of meals. The big joke was that he was drinking it in addition to his meals.

I never felt claustrophobic on the boats. You get used to dodging each other in the passageway. I don't think it's any worse than sitting in an aluminum tube at 30,000 feet going hundreds of miles an hour. Lots of people do that every day. There were tasks I wouldn't want though. The torpedomen had a little cart so they could slide inside the torpedo tubes for

cleaning. That's too tight for me.

I didn't have much free time while I was qualifying. I averaged about 6 hours of sleep a night. But, you get used to it. Liberty was great. Janie would come and pick me up and I could spend some time with her and Jeffrey and pretend I was a civilian for a while.

One day I came back from liberty and found the forward deck on the port side was all torn up. I missed some real excitement. Another boat had come in to tie up alongside us and didn't stop in time. It rammed our port bow and crunched part of the decking. Luckily, the damage was superficial and the tender was able to repair it. I picked up a small piece of the teak wood deck and still have it. It's probably the only thing left of the Diodon now. I can imagine what the captain of the other boat was saying when this happened. It was probably an ensign on the bridge. We had a similar incident, but we just kissed a boat dock.

Once, the tender replaced one of our screws. I don't remember why now. Guys in scuba gear attached a line to it and used a rope-like explosive to knock it loose. That was fun to watch

In November of '64 we had a change of command. Our captain, Commander Cummings was moving on and we got a new one, Lieutenant Commander Speer. I had no complaints with Captain Cummings, but Captain Speer turned out to be really great. Again, I was very lucky.

Overhaul

The boats required regular overhauls to make repairs and updates and refresh the batteries. And, shortly after our change of command, ours came due. So, it was back to San Francisco and Hunter's Point for four months, leaving Janie and Jeffrey in San Diego. I might have been able to get dependent quarters on the base, but she really didn't want to live on a Navy base. And, besides, we would have to give up our nice duplex. During the overhaul I managed to make the trip down to see them several times.

On the way up, we were just outside the Golden Gate and our radar went dead. I opened the console and began troubleshooting the problem. I remember it was in the deflection circuit of the display. I checked it, but couldn't see what was causing the failure. And, the circuit design looked strange to me. I couldn't figure out how it could possibly work. There's a lot of traffic around the entrance to the bay, and I knew the captain wanted the radar operational. So, I made a minor modification. I think I added a

component. Well, thankfully it worked. I don't know if it got changed back during overhaul and I never checked to see if it did. But, the radar never failed again during my time aboard.

As we passed in front of San Francisco, the captain had a bunch of us stand at ease on deck facing the city. We were in dungarees, but I doubt whether many people noticed us anyway. But, it was cool seeing the city go by.

We off loaded our stuff and they put the boat in dry dock. At first, they housed us in a floating barge. Us, meaning the enlisted men. It was drafty and uncomfortable. But, that didn't last long and we were soon in the same barracks I was in during my first two week training session. The chiefs got the second floor. They kept beer in a frig and you could go up and buy a can. Our cooks took over the small mess hall.

One day I got called aside by one of the chiefs. We had lockers at the foot of our bunks, and somebody had stolen some money out of one. They wanted me to put some money with a dye on it that only showed up under UV light in my wallet and leave it in my locker unlocked. So I did. After several days, the money was still there, and I gave it back. I don't think they ever found out who the thief was. Maybe there really wasn't a thief. Or, maybe he didn't think I would have enough cash to be worth the effort.

They wanted me to be a duty driver. To drive a Navy vehicle you have to pass a driving test. So, four of us went out in a pickup truck to some near by city streets and took turns under the watchful eye of the guy testing us. Three of us did fine, but the fourth guy obviously didn't want to be a duty driver. He gave us a really wild ride until the tester made him pull over. He wasn't from our boat, so I don't know what happened to him. I only remember driving someone once. An officer wanted to go over to the Alameda Naval Air station for some reason, and I drove him across the bay bridge in a jeep. I was glad to get back in one piece. That jeep was not designed for freeway driving.

Watching the boat being overhauled was really interesting. When you could walk underneath it you could see how huge it really was. And, for the first time I was able to see the big bump under the bow that housed the Sonar transducers.

It was a major overhaul. Besides removing the battery cells, they cut the top off the forward engine room and removed one of the engines. From now on we would have just three. They moved some other equipment in its place and left enough room for a book cupboard that became the ship's library. When somebody was done with a book they would add it. We did

a lot of reading at sea. I read Mitchner's Hawaii and the entire Horatio Hornblower series among others.

I don't know about surface ships, but there isn't much room on a submarine for hobbies. One of our guys liked to race slot cars and he brought a couple aboard for show and tell. That's the closest thing I can remember to anyone having a hobby. I never saw a musical instrument, even a harmonica. I guess you would have to be pretty good to keep from having it shoved down your throat.

There wasn't much music of any kind other than movies or TV in the mess area. The TV only worked when we were in port. This was way before Ipods or even the Walkman. Tape and record players were big and clumsy, and portable radios don't work so well when the walls are made of steel. There was a Fisher Stereo receiver in the ward room, and I rigged it up so it could play throughout the boat over the 1mc system. But, it was rarely done. The 1mc had pretty low fidelity, and it's hard to pick music that pleases everybody. It's no wonder sailors sometimes went a little crazy when they hit the beach.

The battery cells were huge. Each one delivered two volts and they were put in series to supply 250 volts per battery.

I was walking through one of the repair shops one day and was shocked to see electronic equipment covered with soap suds. I always figured electronics and water didn't mix. But, I was told that they rinsed with distilled water and dried them in an oven, and it was the best way to get them clean.

I enjoyed helping the yard workers. Sometimes I would run errands for them. I have heard them called yard birds, but I would never use that. They were good guys and they worked under hazardous conditions. I was walking through the boat and there was one down inside the sanitary tank painting it. Another time when the periscopes were pulled, there was one down inside the periscope well doing some work. Obviously no claustrophobia here. The interior of the pressure hull was covered in asbestos, and the work they were doing stirred up a lot of it. This was before the real hazard of it was realized. I wonder how many of these guys came down with lung cancer. I stood fire watch on occasion, which just meant standing by a welder with a fire extinguisher. When we were done with our overhaul, the yard workers gave out custom belt buckles with dolphins soldered on them to a few of us. I was proud to be one of the ones who got one and I still have it.

In April of '64 I passed my qualification test and got my dolphins while

we were still in dry dock. I walked through the boat with my officer examiner and, even though nothing was functional, I was able to explain things to his satisfaction. The next morning at quarters one of the chiefs asked me for my wallet and shoes and I was grabbed and tossed off the pier into the bay. This was the normal custom and I expected it. Life got a lot easier after being qualified.

Being qualified meant I could start standing below decks watch, which I did even though the boat was still in dry dock. At night, no one was aboard but me and nothing was running. There was nothing to do but walk through each compartment once in a while. At the end of my watch I would walk back to the barracks and wake up my relief.

Like I said, I made several trips down to see Janie. For most of these I flew standby on PSA, Pacific Southwest Airlines. A driver would take me to the airport and I would wait and hope for a vacant seat. And, there usually was one. The planes landed at Lindbergh field, and it was normally pretty smooth. But, on one flight the pilot was really a hot rodder. We circled the city and he banked so hard I could look out the window straight down at the zoo. Then he did a carrier landing, coming in high and dropping at the last moment. Maybe he was ex Navy.

One trip I did in the company of our executive officer. We were driven to Alameda Naval Air station and caught a MATs plane. MAT stands for military air transport. The plane was a military version of a DC7 four engine airliner. These were piston engines, not jets. We started down the runway and kept rolling and rolling for what seemed like forever, until it it finally got off the ground. The seats faced the rear of the plane for some reason. We landed at North Island and the XO gave me a ride in his car to our apartment.

On that trip, I returned north on another Navy plane. It was a small twin engine Grumman of the type that is capable of carrier landings. It seated eight of us, four on each side facing each other and there were no windows to look out of. It roared like the devil until we reached cruising altitude and then the pilot dropped the rpm suddenly and it kind of scared me. We had just leveled off, but it felt like we dropped. We made a brief stop at China Lake on the way up, but with no windows, I didn't see any of it.

On another trip, I rode back with a shipmate in his car. The idea was that I would share gas cost and driving. I felt lucky to survive. When it was my turn to drive, I discovered that the steering had so much play in it that you had to constantly move the steering wheel to go straight. It was night time and I was really nervous, especially after passing a wreck on

the highway. I finally told him I couldn't drive this thing and he took the wheel for the rest of the way.

One of the officers had moved his wife and child onto the base and he asked me if I would be interested in baby sitting. I guess since I had a wife and kid I seemed safe. So, I did, and made a couple of bucks. Compared to our duplex in San Diego, their place was pretty grim. It was just a corrugated steel Quonset hut. Janie would have hated it.

I made one excursion to downtown San Francisco. One of my buddies and I caught a bus at the gate. I seem to remember it was about ten cents and you could transfer and ride all over town, even the cable cars. They had an excellent transit system. We saw Golden Gate park, ate something at Fisherman's Wharf, and went through Madam Tussaud's Wax museum. It was a fun day, but once was enough for me.

Out of Overhaul

The yard finished up their work and it was time to take the boat out for a test run. Several of the yard workers went along for the ride. Maybe that was to boost our confidence. Things went well until we made our first test dive. I was at the radar console in the conn. They cleared the bridge and the command Dive Dive was given, two blasts of the klaxon, the main induction valve was closed and the tank vents were opened. Normal down angle on a dive is ten degrees. We started down and the angle went to ten, then eleven, and kept going. It eventually reached 37 degrees. The old chief quartermaster standing next to me kept saying “We're going to hit the bottom, we're going to get stuck in the mud.” Apparently the water wasn't really deep where we were. I just held on to the console and braced myself.

Very shortly I could hear ballast tanks being blown and the order was given “All back full.” The boat shuddered and the bow gradually came up and we surfaced. There was one injury, an officer in the forward torpedo room had his collar bone broken by a flying tool box. Needless to say, we headed back in. I didn't see any more of the yard workers, so I don't know how they took it.

It turned out there was a faulty gauge on the forward trim tank and it was over filled, making the boat bow heavy. Trim is critical on a submarine. The trim tanks were filled according to calculations that should have been close to optimum. But, that didn't allow for a faulty gauge. Anyway, the gauge was fixed, we went out again and all was well. But, from then on I always felt a little trepidation on every dive.

We got a new Chief of the Boat, or COB, while we were at Hunter's Point. The most senior enlisted man automatically becomes the COB. He is responsible for all personnel matters, including watches, liberty, and bunks. The new COB was a chief ET, so he was my direct boss. I can't recall his name now, but some of the chiefs called him Gunner. He was once a gunner's mate who converted to ET. When the Navy had a shortage in certain rates, they would convert people. Upper ranks of ET's were scarce because not many of them shipped over due to job opportunities in civilian life. Our highest ranked sonarman was Jim Ewing, a first class petty officer. Jim was an Irish native of New York City and a wonderful guy. He had converted too. I think he was once a torpedoman. He was old enough to have served in WWII aboard a boat and had been depth charged. He could tell some great stories. Jim was nearing mandatory retirement age, and really should have been a chief. But, he couldn't pass the required electronics test. He once asked me if I would help him study for it, and I said sure. But, he never got back to me. I think he just gave up.

Gunner asked me where I wanted to bunk. I said the after battery, and I got a choice spot, the middle waist high bunk next to the passageway on the starboard side. The after battery is just about mid ship and the area with the least up and down motion. The head was a few steps aft and the mess hall a few steps forward. By the way, we slept head to head and feet to feet for obvious reasons.

I had a bunk locker. The mattress lay on the lid and the lid could be propped open. The locker was about four or five inches deep and you could store a lot of stuff in it. There were also square lockers in the bulkhead outboard of the bunks. On occasion I would have to move to allow someone to get their stuff. Besides the locker, I had a zippered cylindrical bunk bag that hung on the bunk railing. It was handy for things like toiletries.

Well, we loaded up the boat and headed up the coast to Washington state for fire control alignment. We sailed up the Strait of Juan de Fuca and tied up at Port Angeles Washington. The reason for the stop here was to take some local reservists out for a day. I got the day off and with a buddy, took a ferry ride over to Victoria B.C. Canada. Victoria is a really pretty place. It was Spring and there were flowers everywhere. We took a double decker bus tour and walked around the city. I bought a can of real English tea.

Port Angeles was a neat little town. I got some of the best clam chowder I've ever had at a little cafe on the main street. Olympia beer, Olies, was popular. I had a schooner of it in one of the bars. I did a mail run to the

local post office and heard us referred to as sewer pipe sailors. I'd never heard that one before.

I guess the sea was a little rough during the outing with the reservists and some got sick, much to the amusement of the regular crew. During their noon chow, a big burly machinist mate known as Guts Brogan walked into the mess area and asked the cooks what was for lunch. It was spaghetti. He said “Aw hell, I'm in a hurry” and scooped a hand full of spaghetti out of the garbage bucket, picked a cigarette butt out of it, crammed it in his mouth and walked out. I wish I had been there to see that. Guys swore it was true.

We left Port Angeles and headed for a pristine backwater inlet that belonged to the Navy. This is where the alignment was to be done. It was a beautiful spot, nothing but water and woods. We tied up at a little dock and were free to explore. I had never seen trees so thick together. They looked like you wouldn't have room to walk through them. Deer were all over the place. The shore line was pebbly and you could walk out and pick shellfish off the rocks. We had some fishing gear aboard and a few of us tried our luck. The bait would hit the water and be immediately gobbled up by hoards of little fish. I couldn't get past them to the bigger ones below. But, the Stewards did. I got to sample some that they fried up in their little pantry. It was fantastic.

The Stewards were good guys. I never could do a decent job of spit shining my shoes. One of them said “Here, let me show you”, and he spit shined them for me in nothing flat. Even though I watched closely, I could never duplicate that shine.

There was a small club a short distance from the pier, and one evening we had a beer party there. Olies, of course. I drank a little too much and got pretty happy. But, it was fun.

I caught a bus with a couple other guys to downtown Seattle. This was not long after the World's Fair and we went up in the Space Needle and walked through the Science Center. And, we stopped at the local USO and got a coke from some friendly young ladies.

With the alignment complete, we headed back to San Diego and it was local ops again for a while. It was great to be back with Janie and Jeffrey. We had a dependents' day, when we could bring our family aboard to tour the boat and even go out for a short cruise and dive. Janie did a walk through, but that was enough for her. She said it was claustrophobic. There was no way she would go to sea in that thing, let alone dive.

Since I was now qualified, I stood below decks watches, and one of my duties was to blow the sanitary tank. The sanitary tank was our storage for sewage. The galley, two toilets, and the shower drained into it. Periodically, it had to be emptied and this was done by blowing it out through an underwater port using compressed air. There was a strict procedure to do this as you can imagine. First, the drains from the shower, mess area, and basins were closed. The vent was shut, then the outlet in the forward engine room was opened, and lastly 225psi air was let in. The toilets had a big ball valve in the bottom as a seal. To flush, you would open the valve to drain and turn another one to let new water in. One day I was in the engine room opening the outlet valve and looked up to see a chief standing in the hatch with water dripping from his face. I thought, Oh shit, I'm screwed. But, I hadn't done anything wrong. The air valve to sanitary was leaky. So, even though it was shut, air was entering the tank and I had closed the vents. So, pressure was building up. The chief had used the head and when he opened the ball valve to flush, it blew back at him. I didn't get chewed out. He was a good guy and took it well, maybe because he was in charge of the auxiliary men who maintained the valves.

The captain wanted a portable tape recorder for the boat, and I was selected to go downtown and buy one. The only restriction was that it had to be made by a U.S. company. Japanese brands were entering the market with some nice equipment, but they were excluded. So, I purchased a Wollensak. It was a good solid machine. The Hi Fi system in the ward room and our TV were also made in the U.S.A.

The sixties were turbulent times. In August of '65 the Watt's riots took place in Los Angeles. One of my shipmates was a young black guy. His Mom was living in Watts and he was really worried about her. Thankfully, she got through it OK.

In November, I passed the exam for second class. At that time, the rule was that you had to have one year left of active duty to get a promotion. For me, that would mean a three month extension. Janie and I decided that, even though we could certainly use the extra pay, it wasn't worth it. So, I remained a third class petty officer.

Westpac

Also in November, the time came for our deployment to the far east, a Westpac cruise. There were a couple of sobering things that were done to prepare for it. First, they had us make out a will, and an officer who was a notary public signed it. Then, the Captain made a phone number chain list

for the wives. If need be, one wife would call the next number and so on. Then they painted over the numbers on the sail. Those big white numbers would make it too easy to spot. And finally, they welded steel straps across the rescue buoy on the forward deck. You wouldn't want it to pop loose at the wrong time.

Knowing that I would be seeing some pretty exotic stuff, I wanted a better camera than our little instamatic. So, Janie and I went shopping at Sears. Their cheapest 35mm camera was 25 dollars. I asked the salesman if it would take decent pictures and he said any of the 35mm's would. We bought one. It was a brand I'd never heard of, the body was all plastic, focus was by little pictures of a head, body and mountain, and lens opening was by guess. But, it did take nice photos.

The deployment was supposed to last six months. As it turned out, it was seven.

Leaving Janie and Jeffrey on the dock was the hardest thing I've ever done. At least when we were in overhaul, I could come home occasionally. But, this would be half a year straight. To this day, I get a lump when I see newscasts of sailors or soldiers leaving their loved ones for deployment. It must be really tough knowing they will see real combat.

So, we set off to cross the Pacific. Normally we would have made a stop at Hawaii. But, there was a big storm in that area so we went north to avoid it. Well, it must have been a really bad storm because we hit some really high seas. Before we hit the worst of it, I went up on the bridge for a look. The swells were tremendous. It was like sailing over big hills. Well, not exactly over. The knife edge bow of the boat sort of cut through them and the water came over the deck and splashed against the sail. When it got really bad, the watch officer and lookouts came below and we secured the hatch. Instead of them, we relied on the periscope and radar, which were probably more effective anyway.

With all that pounding, one of the clam shells came loose aft and was flapping around. The Skipper was afraid it would break loose entirely and hit one of the screws, so a repair party was formed to go topside and cut it free. The party consisted of about five guys. There were hand rails around the sail, but no other railing. Instead, there was a steel track that went from bow to stern. Each man wore a belt with a line secured to it. At the other end was an attachment to slide in the rail. That was all they had to keep from getting blown overboard. And, rescue would have been impossible in those seas. Well, they did it. They sawed it loose, and came back below wet and cold. Each of them got a small bottle of medicinal brandy. I'm

sure they got letters of commendation too.

I never got any Navy brandy. But, once I had a cold and the corpsman gave me a little bottle of cough syrup. It was loaded with codeine and certainly made me feel better for a while. Drinking alcohol aboard was against Navy regulations which were posted on the inside of the doors in the head so you couldn't miss them and in the mess area. But, one of the chiefs did give me a swig out of his bottle of Seagram's 7 once, and the electricians were suspected of getting into the grain alcohol that was used for cleaning switches.

Sleeping was a challenge. The rolls were severe enough to toss some guys out of their bunk. You had to sleep bracing yourself in. Hammocks would have been better. Meals were a challenge too. I don't know how the cooks did it. A lot of us got sea sick. At one point, I was on the radar and knew I was about to barf. So, I zipped up the ladder and barfed inside the sail. The sail is free flooding so it was quickly washed away. What I did was strictly against rules, but nobody said anything. The corpsman gave us some pills that helped a lot and I got it under control.

You might wonder why we didn't just submerge. There are a couple reasons. A submarine is stable on the surface and submerged. But, there is a time between these conditions when it isn't. A side blow at the this time could tip it over. So, unless there is an extreme emergency, you don't dive or surface when it's rough. Also, cruising speed is much less for a diesel sub when submerged and batteries would soon give out. And, you can't use the snorkel in really heavy seas.

Things were much better after we cleared the storm. My only problem then was staying awake during mid watch. Imagine you are standing next to a warm radar console in the middle of the night. It's quiet except for the rumbling of the engines. The boat is gently rolling and the lighting is dim red. You're watching the trace on the radar scope go round and round and looking for any contacts. And, there aren't any. Nothing but sea noise hour after hour. You try to stay alert, because if there were a contact you'd be in big trouble for not reporting it. And, we did see a few small Japanese fishing boats out there in the middle of the ocean. I've never been so sleepy. When I was relieved, I crashed.

Japan

Nineteen days after leaving San Diego, we entered Tokyo bay. We tied up at a wharf in the Yokosuka Naval Base and there was a Japanese guy waiting for us with tickets for free whiskey at the White Hats Club. It was

said that if you wanted to know where you were going next, just ask one of the local bar girls. We pronounced Yokosuka as Yokooska. That's sort of similar to the way the Japanese pronounced it. The White Hat Club was a tiny bar near the base that was frequented mostly by submarine sailors. I got to know it pretty well. After such a long hard trip, we were ready to celebrate and I joined the gang there that night. The free whiskey was some cheap Japanese stuff and I got totally wasted. I staggered back to the boat and fell into my bunk. The next morning I wanted to die. It's the first and only time I've ever been really drunk. Jim Ewing took pity on me and let me sleep it off in his bunk that was back in an out of the way corner of the after battery. Did I tell you he was a great guy?

But, the White Hat Club was really a great place. While we were in Yokosuka we were their main customers, and we got to know them. It was a comfortable place to hang out with your buddies. They didn't rip you off. Although I never did it, you could bring in your own bottle of booze and they would put your name on it and keep it for you. You just paid them something for the use of a glass. Bottled liquor was cheap on the base. I generally just had a beer. If you were hungry, you could send out for an order of fried rice. I have no idea where it came from, but it was really tasty.

Most of the bars had girls who would ask you to buy them a cherry drink. What that was was a non-alcoholic drink that the bar charged too much for and the girls got a cut. The deal was, the girl would sit and talk with you while she drank it and encourage you to buy more drinks. I suspect you could buy even more if you had the money and inclination. I didn't have either one, but it was fun to watch.

Yokosuka was actually a nice little city. But, the section next to the base was about what you would expect. It had everything a sailor might spend money on. Of course that meant a lot of bars and souvenir shops. I eventually bought two personalized mugs, one for Janie and one for me, an oil painting on silk of my son done from a small photo I carried, and a pipe made out of whale bone. I'm lousy at bargaining and had a friend dicker for the pipe for me. You could also get beautiful embroidery done on the lining of your uniform. Some of the guys had dragons and all sorts of stuff inside their sleeves. Here's a photo I took of a typical street.

I went wandering around the main part of town one day. It was shortly before Christmas and I was surprised to see pictures of Santa Claus on some of the stores. I don't think many of the people were Christians, but that didn't seem to matter. In front of one of the stores on the other side of the street I saw an old guy in a WWII army uniform. He seemed to be taking donations. Maybe it was some kind of veteran's charity. It was just twenty years since the end of the war.

Two things you have to say about the Japanese, they're efficient and they're organized. On my first time topside after I sobered up, I looked aft and the missing clam shell had been replaced. You would never know it was gone. Then, later that day a crew of five with their hard hats, white coveralls, and gloves came aboard to do some work. Each man knew exactly what to do and with very little talk they did it and were gone. I was impressed.

Yokosuka was our home base during deployment, so I got to spend some time sight seeing. The Navy set up a bus tour with a lady chaperone so a bunch of us could see Tokyo. Tokyo is only about thirty miles from Yokosuka as the crow flies. It's a little farther by bus. On the way, we passed close enough to see the Yokohama shipyards where some of the largest freighters of the time were being built.

We went up in Tokyo Tower, visited the site of the 1964 Olympics and ate lunch sitting on the floor while thin sliced beef was cooked on a little grill in front of us. The tower was kind of a disappointment. It was so hazy that about all we could see was the ground below us. There was a man and his small son on the observation deck. A couple of our guys were pretty tall and the little boy was goggle eyed by these strange looking giants and their funny outfits.

We had such a good time that three of us went back on our own. This time we took the train. I didn't get the chance to ride the famous high speed bullet train that was new then, but the one we rode was really nice. It was electric and smooth riding. Everything was spotless. On these trips I got to see a lot of Japanese buildings. In general, they looked like crap, especially the houses. Many weren't even painted. I understand that Japanese homes were very nice inside. I never found out.

Walking around Tokyo we came across a Burlesque theater. Well, we couldn't pass that up. It was interesting. The place was packed with Japanese men and us. There wasn't any striptease. It was more like a Japanese version of a Las Vegas show with dancing girls in colorful ornate costumes that showed most everything but nipples and pubic hair. The girls were pretty and we certainly enjoyed watching them. The highlight of the show was a Caucasian blonde girl who did a solo routine. The audience went wild. There were also some guys who did comedy skits that we didn't get at all. As we left, I needed to use the public toilet. I was surprised that it was just a porcelain hole in the floor.

We stopped at a small diner and I had a bowl of noodles. And, before coming back we had a beer and dried squid in a little bar that was a few steps down from the sidewalk.

Another time a buddy and I took a train to Kamakura, a small seaside town not far from Yokosuka. The main attraction here is the giant bronze Buddha. It's hollow and you can go inside, which we did. There was a window in the back on the second level that you could look out of. Kids were running around and playing in it. People were having their pictures taken in front of it, but no one seemed to treat it as some sacred object. The Japanese treated their religions pretty lightly. I asked a fellow once if he was Buddhist or Shinto. He said both. He was Buddhist at night and Shinto during the day. I think he might have been putting me on, but people here did seem to practice both without any conflict.

We also visited a Shinto shrine, a beautiful big wooden building surrounded by trees. In a display case inside was a dummy dressed in

ancient armor. Again, no one seemed especially reverent.

For lunch we stopped in a small fast food place. There were pictures of food items, but all the writing was in Japanese. So, I just pointed at something that looked fairly harmless. It was something inside ball of rice wrapped in seaweed. It wasn't anything I would order again, but it was OK.

There is an old battleship, the Mikasa, close to the base in Yokosuka and a couple of us went over to tour it. It was built in 1899. It's a museum now, imbedded in concrete. The big guns were fixed, pointing straight out of the sides, just like the old sailing ships. Inside were a bunch of displays, some model ships and what interested me, the original spark gap transmitter in the radio room.

There was a hot bath place just outside the gate and I was told it was something I should experience. If your thinking there was some hanky panky going on, forget it. It was a hot bath factory. There was a line of sailors going in and a string of sailors coming out. You paid your fee and went in a room and took your clothes off. Then you sat on a little stool while a woman soaped you down. She handed you a wash rag to clean your own privates. Then she doused you with water. Now that you were clean you sat neck deep in a tub in the floor filled with very hot water and soaked for about 10 minutes. When you got out, she handed you a towel and you dried off. Then you wrapped the towel around your waste and laid down on a table so she could beat the heck out of you. When she was done, you dressed again and gave her a tip and walked out as limp as a rag.

Some of us went to a local movie house one evening. We sat in the front row so we could feed the rats. You could throw a few kernels of popcorn towards the screen and pretty soon a rat would run out and get it. I think the movie was some James Bond thing. It was in English with Japanese sub-titles. Walking back to the base we passed a Japanese couple. She was in a fancy dress and he wore a nice suit. She stood there staring off in space while he was pissing on a lamp post.

Japanese cabs were a curiosity. This was before Japanese cars became common in the U.S. Beside the fact that they drove on the left like the British, they were small. The drivers wore white cotton gloves and they had a lever that could open a door for the passenger. Fares were cheap, and I don't think tips were expected. Another vehicle that I had never seen before was the three wheeled tricycle truck. I saw a lot of them.

While we were in Yokosuka, one of our chiefs was promoted to warrant

officer. To celebrate, the other chiefs threw him a party ashore and invited the rest of the crew. It was in a small building just off base. There was a fairly large room with tables and benches, and there was beer of course. The highlight of the evening was a striptease dancer. She had a fair figure, but her face wouldn't win any prizes. Anyway, she did her dance and then she walked over to me and put her foot up on my bench as if to offer me her leg. While I briefly considered that, the guy next to me chose that moment to spit on the floor. You should have seen the look of disgust on her face. She said something that sounded nasty and stormed off. So, I never found out what a Japanese girl's leg feels like.

Base Life

Yokosuka was, and I guess still is, a pretty good sized base, and I had plenty of time to walk around and see it. One day I was doing that and heard some guy yell “Straighten that hat sailor.” I looked around and it was some enlisted guy on a cat walk in dungarees. I didn't know what rank he was, so I pushed my white hat a little and cursed under my breath something about how much I loved the Navy.

The sound of the Japanese national anthem came across the water every morning. I never figured out where it was coming from. Not all Japanese people were happy that we were there. One day we were restricted to base because of a demonstration outside the gate. But we were always treated well individually. I never felt any sense of danger or ill feelings in Japan.

I went to a Navy Optometrist for a checkup and got new glasses. They were free, but ugly. But, there was a civilian shop on base where you could buy better frames cheap and they would put your Navy lenses in them.

They sent us all to see a Navy dentist for checkups. Mine went well, except the dentist noticed that I had one wisdom tooth missing. It had been impacted when I was a teenager and removed. He said “That's no good having an un-opposed wisdom tooth. The other one should come out.” “And, while we're at it we might as well pull the other two. They'll only cause you future trouble.” Well, he was a lieutenant commander and I didn't want to put up a fuss, so I said OK, and lost three healthy teeth.

For some reason we were told not to go to barber shops in the city. I can't imagine why. The Japanese are super clean people. And yet, the barbers on the base were Japanese civilians. It was the first time I had my hair cut by a lady barber, and she did a fine job.

Johnny Mathis did a show while I was there. But, I wasn't a Johnny Mathis fan so I skipped it. There were shows in the enlisted men's club. The entertainers were Japanese and they were really good. If you closed your eyes you could believe they were Americans. During happy hour, mixed drinks were ten cents, and I used this opportunity to try some things I'd never had, like a gin and tonic (ugh) and Martini (eh!).

There was a Gym on the base and a few of us went over to shoot some baskets. These were indoor courts and next to them were a couple trampolines. So, of course we had to jump on them. I was stupid enough to try and do a forward flip and landed on the back of my neck. Something inside went crack, and I thought “Oh shit, I've broken my neck.” I lay there for a moment before gingerly trying to move my feet. Thankfully, everything still worked. That was the end of my trampoline jumping.

I saw only one other submarine while we were in Yokosuka. The Archerfish, SS311 came in. It looked exactly like it had during the war when it sank the largest ship ever sunk by a submarine, the Japanese carrier Shinano. Now it was on a scientific mission surveying oceanic conditions around the world. Here it is sailing past us outbound.

I didn't have much spending money. I was sending most of my pay back to Janie. But, I did splurge a little at the local Navy Exchange. Japanese cameras were a bargain, and I couldn't resist buying a Canon

rangefinder camera. I would have preferred a single lens reflex, but they were a little out of my range. I also picked up a set of four small hand blown wine glasses and a Geisha doll in a red silk kimono. At a gift shop on base I bought a copy of Japan an Interpretation by Lafcadio Hearn. It's a classic book about Japan. I also bought a soroban, the Japanese version of an abacus. I tried using it on the boat, but the beads kept sliding out of place as the boat rolled. By the way, when you've been on a boat for a while and step on solid ground, you get the strange feeling that the ground is moving.

There was a fund on the boat for short term loans. It was run by one of the chiefs. And, if you needed a few dollars to hold you over till payday, you could borrow and pay it back with some interest. I never had to use it.

Another item I couldn't pass up was a small reel to reel tape recorder. On one of our exercises, I asked one of the chiefs to start it for me in the control room when we surfaced. He did, and I still have that tape, the whole thing from “Secure from condition baker” to “lookouts to the bridge.” With that success, I asked him to do the same for the next dive. Unfortunately, a switch that connects the speaker was left on and it let out a horrendous squeal at a bad time. That was the end of that experiment. When I got back home, we used it to record some of Jeffrey's early words.

I should expand on that surfacing routine. When surfacing, the command “Secure from condition baker” would be piped to all compartments. Condition baker meant closing all watertight doors and ventilation ducts, and was done when coming up to periscope depth. Once the watch officer had a chance to look around and see that the area was clear, it was canceled.

The next announcement would be “Prepare to surface, two main engines”, or three or four. The chief on the hydraulic manifold would close all ballast tank vents and report them closed. Next would come “Surface surface surface” followed by three blasts of the klaxons in all compartments. High pressure air would be released to the bow buoyancy tank to raise the bow, followed by air to the other buoyancy tanks. Once the boat broke the surface, the high pressure air would be shut off and the low pressure blower started to finish the blow. The low pressure blower drew air from inside the boat. During submergence, a slight pressure built up in the boat from air leaks. As soon as the blower brought the pressure down to normal, the upper hatch would be opened and the command given “Lookouts to the bridge”, and the seamen on the planes would go up.

All this would be followed by opening the main induction valve in the

sail and starting the engines. The low pressure blower would continue until all the water was blown out of the ballast tanks. I can still hear the roar of that blower and feel the fresh sea air coming through the hatch.

Akai reel to reel tape decks and big ceramic Hibachi grills were popular items. Some of the big stuff went back to the states on a mine sweeper that was heading home.

Beer Break

Here's something to show what kind of a captain we had, We made a brief stop at Sasebo to pick up a replacement corpsman on the way to a patrol. While we were there, Captain Speer sent over for beer, and the whole crew got a beer break right there on the quay. Here's a photo I took.

Patrols

Patrols were one of the things we were there for. To be honest, I can't remember how many we did. There were at least two, and maybe three. My memories of them run together. One reason for this is that they were all pretty much the same for most of the crew. We didn't know where we were going or what we were doing, and the command wanted it that way. We were given a cover story in the remote chance that we were captured. We were doing hydrographic surveys. We were also instructed not to keep

any diaries or logs. Obviously, what we were really doing was gathering information.

On one of them we took on two communication technicians. They took over the radio room. With them came a Marine officer who always wore a side arm. I was told he was there to make sure the technicians never got taken captive. I don't know how they felt about that. They were pretty closed mouth. During that patrol, a piece of equipment in the radio room failed. I was asked to try and fix it, and I did. For this, I got a special letter of commendation from Captain Speer. But, I didn't get a copy because it was classified as a secret document.

Nothing really exciting happened in any of our patrols. Once, when I was standing sonar watch, I thought I heard a submarine. Jim Ewing was called to the sonar shack to check it out and he said it was just a fishing boat. We did cross paths with a Chinese sub once when I wasn't on watch. It never saw us.

The Vietnam war was really heating up, and there was a combat zone designated in surrounding waters. On one patrol we barely entered it. This entitled us to one month's freedom from income tax and authorization to wear a Vietnam ribbon. So, even though I never saw VietNam and don't deserve it, I am technically a Vietnam veteran.

It was in this area that we almost got run over by one of our own ships. We were at periscope depth and it slipped up on us. When the watch officer spotted it, we immediately went deep. He wasn't the only one who went phew.

Preparing for a patrol meant stuffing every nook and cranny with stores. Even the after battery hatch was used. The bottom was sealed off with a cover and it was filled with potatoes. A typical patrol lasted about 25 days.

When we were on station, we stayed submerged all the time. During the day we ran on batteries, and when it got dark we snorkeled and recharged. By the time that happened, the air got pretty thin. It was funny. A match wouldn't stay lit, but guys would still try to keep a cigarette burning. It was a strange feeling. You could breath as hard as you like, but still feel like you weren't getting enough air. What triggered this sensation was not lack of oxygen. It was the build up of carbon dioxide. The corpsman would check for excess and if it got too high he could spread some absorbent powder. We never got to that point. You could always bleed a little air into the boat from the storage tanks if you had to.

I can remember lying in my bunk feeling like I was suffocating and

waiting for the snorkel to start. When it did it was wonderful. The engines drew air from inside the boat and fresh sea air was sucked in to replace it. One time we had a false start. Instead of kicking over, the engine back fired and spewed acrid diesel exhaust into the boat. That went over really well with the crew.

Showers were allowed every four days. And, they had to be short Navy showers. Anyone wasting water would find themselves standing a still watch in the forward engine room. After four days you can get pretty ripe, and a shower and change of clothes felt sooo good.

Somewhere along the line we picked up cockroaches. Guys had candy bars stashed in their lockers and found holes nibbled in them. But, canned and frozen stuff was safe. We had a cockroach race once. This is probably a tradition in the Navy. The roaches were let loose at one end of a mess table. The first one to the other end won and a small amount of money was exchanged. It relieved the boredom a little.

One funny incident sticks in my memory. A seaman standing bow planes watch asked the diving officer if he could get a break to go to the head. It was only about 15 minutes from the end of his watch, and the officer replied that he thought he could wait that long. A few minutes later, a turd dropped out of his trouser leg onto the deck. After everyone in the control room stopped laughing, he got his break.

The nuclear boats can stay submerged at sea for six months at a time. I can't imagine how tedious that must be. It seems like they would go nuts. I guess you adjust.

Nagoya

We made an R & R stop at Nagoya, Japan for a few days. This was during the time when the Green Berets were a big deal, and Captain Speer felt we should be blue berets. So, he bought everybody a blue beret. Of course it wasn't part of an official Navy uniform, but we were allowed to wear them during liberty in Nagoya. Here I am looking dopey in it. You can tell the guy standing topside watch is impressed.

Nagoya was a good size city, and I enjoyed my visit. I saw the zoo, which was so-so, the arboretum, which was very nice, watched The Greatest Story Ever Told with Japanese sub-titles, and toured Nagoya castle, which was very impressive. And, a group of us explored an underground shopping mall and got thoroughly lost. The city had supplied us with an interpreter who stayed by the phone in the control room. We dialed him for help, and he told us to flag down a passerby. Using sign language, we were able to put a local fellow on the phone who told our babysitter where we were. And, he in turn told us how to make our way back to the boat. One curious thing I noticed in the mall; many of the signs were in English. Why, I can't imagine. We were the only non Japanese that I saw.

One of the interpreters owned a small cafe and a couple of us stopped by for lunch. I had some sushi that was like eating fishy tasting fat, some deep fried little fish that I ate whole, and a bowl of very clear soup with some pieces of fish, including a fin, in it. I'm not a big fan of Japanese food.

Okinawa

We were a couple days out from Okinawa when something seized up in

my lower back. I was getting out of my bunk and had a sharp pain the took my breath away. I didn't know what was going on. Our corpsman took a look at it and said it was probably just a strain, but I should see a doctor when we got in. So, we docked at Naha and I made a trip to the nearest Navy medical facility. It was on nearby Kadena Airforce base. The Airforce buildings were handsome stucco structures. The Navy hospital was a Quonset hut. But, there was a doctor there and he checked me over and confirmed the corpsman's diagnosis. His recommendation was to get a hot bath and massage. So, one of my buddies and I went into town to a little place that he knew about. The experience was very different from the one in Japan. First, it was small. We were the only customers while we were there. The procedure was the same with the scrub down and soaking, but the massage was better. And, believe it or not, when we were done and offered a tip, they turned it down. And, in case you are wondering, they didn't offer any additional services.

Okinawa was my favorite place of the whole Westpac cruise. The scenery was gorgeous and the people were really nice. I spent some time just wandering around town taking pictures. There was some kind of festival going on and some of the women and little girls were wearing beautiful kimonos. I asked one woman if I could take a picture of her and her daughter and she cheerfully obliged. What looks like a sidewalk is actually the sewer.

We had two ensigns in our crew, and they managed to get hold of a Navy truck. The two of them in civilian clothes and four of us in our dress blues took a ride all around the island. There were picturesque fishing villages, rolling hills and fields covered with sugar cane, pineapples, and plants I didn't recognize. We drove through a tropical looking canyon with a stream and small homes next to the road and kids playing. We stopped and walked through a natural cave with stalactites and stalagmites. And we visited a small museum with models and samples of classic Ryukyu cultural items and buildings. Along the way, we refreshed ourselves with Orion beer in big twenty ounce bottles. It was a great day.

Normally officers didn't mix with enlisted crew off the boat. I believe that was Navy policy. I don't know where they went or what they did. But, I think it was their loss.

Another day a couple of us caught a civilian bus to the cliffs where many Okinawans and Japanese soldiers committed suicide during the U.S. invasion. There were memorial monuments along the top and a steep path lead down to the beach. We passed several caves that people had hid in. It was pretty sobering. The beach was jagged white coral with tide pools full of tiny animals.

I was sitting in the mess area one day and there was a loud bang and the whole boat shook. I thought we had been rammed. But, it was an earthquake that slammed us against the quay. They're pretty common in Okinawa.

I visited the Kadena enlisted mens' club while we were there. It was really plush. The Air Force went first class.

Hong Kong

If anything brought the mysterious far east to my mind, it was Hong Kong, and I was really excited to get to see it. I'm sort of an anglophile anyway, and the combination of British and Chinese culture fascinated me.

While we were in route there, I was off watch and went up on the bridge for a while. It was a day I will always remember. The sun was shining and there was a gentle swell. We were clipping along at about twelve knots and a pod of dolphins was pacing us. The bow was slicing through the water with an occasional surge over the forward deck. All three engines were rumbling away, and it was just beautiful.

We docked at Victoria Basin, just a short walk from the central part of the city. The sky was gray overcast and it stayed that way all the time we were there. But, the temperature was comfortable.

Not long after we pulled in, a British sub arrived, the H.M.S. Ambush. The British sailors were real professionals. Maybe that's because their enlistment period was nine years rather than our four. When we came in, there were about a dozen guys running around on deck. The Ambush had two, one forward and one aft. And they looked sharp in their white turtleneck sweaters. Here is a photo of the two boats tied up at the quay.

The Ambush was a very different design than ours. For one thing it was a little smaller. One of the British sailors invited me aboard for a tour. A few things about the boat stick in my mind. Whereas we had Formica paneling in the wardroom and mess, they had real wood. Their radio room was a tiny cubby hole a fraction of the size of ours. The valve rocker arms on the engines were fully exposed and right at chest level. I wouldn't want to walk between them in rough seas. The screws could be directly driven by the engines. Ours were permanently attached to electric motors. And the snorkel mast rotated down into the deck instead of being hydraulically raised like ours. Also, it had a deck gun forward of the sail.

This was back when the Royal Navy still got daily rum rations and I was offered a sample. Normally, lower ratings had their rum watered down, but I was given some full strength. I think it was about 150 proof. I took a sip and my tongue went numb. When I swallowed, it burned all the way down. I think my eyes bugged out. The Brits were highly amused, so I guess it had the desired effect. And I'm grateful to have been given the chance to taste the Queen's rum.

It didn't take long for peddlers to show up. I bought a beautiful little gold pocket watch from one of them. It has pop open covers on the front and back, and ran great until we got out to sea again. Years later I worked with a guy whose father was a jeweler. I sent the watch home with him to

see what it would take to get it running. His Dad said it was not repairable. I kept it because it was too pretty to toss.

One guy would do engraving for you right on the spot using what looked like a square nail, a couple of blocks of wood to hold the piece, and a little hammer. It was amazing to watch. He could make dolphins, dragons, or whatever you wanted and they were beautiful.

There was a place in town where you could make long distance phone calls. International calls weren't as convenient or cheap then as they are now. There were phones along the wall with partitions between them. You paid your money for an amount of time and made your call. I think it was about eight dollars for five minutes. The time difference between Hong Kong and San Diego is eight hours. I called in the morning and it was afternoon for Janie. That was tough. Five minutes is just about enough time to say I'm OK, I love you and I miss you. I was still months away from being home.

Janie and I wrote often. I told her where I was and the things I had seen and she kept me up to date on Jeffrey and sent clippings of some of my favorite comic strips.

A big banner on one of the buildings proclaimed that it was British week in Hong Kong. It turned out that Princess Margaret was paying a visit. I was downtown and there was a huge crowd along the quay waiting to see her arrive. I didn't want to fight the crowd, so I missed seeing a real princess.

Hong Kong was an interesting mixture of Chinese and British. The people were Chinese, yet while strolling through town I passed a large field with guys playing cricket. And the buses were double decker, just like in London. The cabs on the other hand were mostly Mercedes Benz. I caught one for a short ride. It was the first time I had ever ridden in a Mercedes and I thought to myself "Some day I'm going to have one of these." Eventually I did, and although it was far from new, it was an excellent handling car.

Janie had written that she would like a cuckoo clock. You could buy almost anything in Hong Kong, so I went shopping in one of the big department stores, and bought one. While there, I also bought a six inch Hemmi slide rule that served me well for years. The cuckoo clock hung on our wall for a long time and when it finally stopped running, I stored it up in the top of the garage. About ten years ago, I decided to try and fix it. I figured I had nothing to lose. I got it going and now it cuckoos the hours in my hobby room.

I did go a little crazy buying things. One day I wandered by myself into a very Chinese section of town; narrow streets crammed with little shops with people living above. There I was in my dress whites with a camera slung around my neck surrounded by Chinese shoppers and shop keepers. I got lots of stares. I didn't feel threatened, just terribly out of place. I came upon a small shop filled with Chinese water pipes, many with beautiful enamel work. I was a pipe collector and really wanted one. The only one in my price range was simple brass with no enamel. I tried to haggle with the grumpy owner, but of course I failed and paid the full asking price for it. I'm sure it was too much, but I went away happy.

One evening I was assigned to shore patrol duty. I reported to the small shore patrol office and they issued me an SP arm band, a white duty belt, and a billy club. I was sternly told, “If you get into trouble, you can use the club, but don't hit on the head.” They paired me with an experienced guy, and as soon as we left the office he said, “If we have any problems, hit them on the head.” Well, luckily we didn't have any problems. We made the rounds of sailor bars and walked into one that was all black guys. I looked around and saw a few from our boat. One of them was a chief, and he seemed a little embarrassed to see me. We had segregation and I didn't even know it. I guess it's not surprising. This was the 60's. But I was kind of taken back by it. There were only four or five African Americans in our crew, and a somewhat higher percentage of Hispanics. I never saw any sign of racial problems on board. We had a black torpedoman from Washington DC who was pretty outspoken. He told me there was a river there they called the White river because that's where they tossed all the white boys. He had a big grin when he said it and I think he was putting me on. Once, during a maneuvering watch topside he got into a brief scuffle with one of our Mexican guys. But, I don't know whether race had anything to do with it.

There was a multistory building near Queen's Landing called the China Fleet Club. It was there for the British sailors, and was kind of a combination enlisted men's club and exchange. I visited one of the shops that was all stuff from India and bought a wood and brass Indian water pipe called a bucbuc. Apparently because that's the sound it makes when you smoke it. Metal pipes really smoke terrible. The tobacco burns too hot.

The crew of the Ambush invited our crew over to the club one evening for a beer party. There was plenty of beer and it was a lot of fun. The Brits started singing songs, mostly dirty and hilarious. We tried to join in, but they were the champs.

Several of us took a mini bus tour around the island. The highlight was lunch on a floating restaurant in Aberdeen harbor. It was typical Chinese food served in a lot of little dishes. The only one I can remember was a bowl of corn chowder. The restaurant was surrounded by small junks with families living on them. None of them looked too prosperous.

I saw a lot of poverty in Hong Kong. There was a hillside covered with tiny shacks that housed people who had escaped from communist China. There was a crew of women who did some painting on our boat and the Ambush in exchange for food. It seems submarines always need painting.

Chuck Haberman, Frank Escobar and I rode a little funicular railway to the top of Victoria peak, the highest point on the island. From the top there was a great view of the city and harbor, and far below through the haze we could see the Diodon and Ambush. Chuck was a fellow ET. I can't remember what Frank's rating was.

The strangest attraction I saw in Hong Kong was a place called Tiger Balm Gardens. Tiger Balm was, and I think still is, a popular medicinal salve in Asia. The owners were Chinese and they built this really weird collection of concrete dioramas on the side of a hill. In front of them was what I would have to call a mansion, a very large ornate building. And, around it were these displays. These were big things, maybe thirty feet square. And they were covered with concrete animals, monkeys, birds, dragons, demons, little buildings, you name it, all painted in bright colors. There was also a pagoda which somebody told me was the tomb of the founder. I don't know if the whole place had any religious significance, but it sure was unique. And, the best part was the free admission.

One day I took a ferry over to Kowloon on the mainland. My main memory of that day was seeing workers on the side of skyscraper standing on scaffolding made entirely of lashed together bamboo. These guys were five or six stories up. I couldn't believe it.

There were shops in Hong Kong that would make custom shoes for you. The deal was, you paid them something and they would make plaster casts of your feet. Then, from anywhere in the world, you could order shoes that were made to fit. You could pick from a catalog or just send them a picture. I didn't go for that, but I did have a custom suit made. In my civilian job, a suit and tie were required. And the price of one here was too good to pass up. They measured me, I picked out a wool fabric and a couple days later it was ready. And, it was beautiful and fit like a glove. The coat had red silk lining with my name embroidered in it. After I got out of the Navy I wore it to work for about a month before the seams

started falling apart.

One other smart buy I made was an angora sweater for Janie. It was pink, fuzzy, and had bead work on the front. I guess it wasn't to her taste because she never wore it. It probably ended up at Goodwill.

Before we left Hong Kong, two of our sailor friends from the Ambush came aboard with their Chinese girl friends. The guys wore suits and the girls were dressed nicely. They were really pretty girls. I've often wondered how those relationships worked out. I suppose they probably didn't. But, it's nice to imagine that they lived happily ever after back in Britain.

Taiwan

My memory of Taiwan is of a dry dusty place. But, to be fair, that might have been due to weather conditions while I was there. We docked in Kaohsiung. When I recently did a Google search on it, I came across this phrase, “Kaohsiung is a massive port city in southern Taiwan. It's home to many skyscrapers.” That was certainly not the case in early 1966. I saw no buildings over a few stories. Prosperity had not arrived yet. In the port area I saw a small ancient looking steam locomotive still being used. Kids on bamboo rafts begged for coins to be thrown in the polluted water so they could dive for them. A man and a woman in a small boat actually wanted to trade sex for items of clothing. A few of our blankets disappeared mysteriously.

As I stood on deck one day, a small boy walked up to the edge of the quay, pulled down his pants, squatted and took a dump in the water. Then he casually pulled his pants up and walked away.

A bunch of us took a bus tour up the coast. I'm not sure how far, but we were back at the boat by the end of the day. There were lots of bicycles, but few cars. There were peddle rickshaws and I saw a couple farm carts being pulled by oxen. We saw one of Chiang Kai-shek's residences, from the outside only. And, we went through a couple temples. One of which was filled with gold Buddhas.

Tensions were high between Taiwan and China. On a ridge between where we tied up and the ocean, we could see big guns pointed in the direction of the mainland. A Taiwanese frogman came aboard. I can't remember why now. He had a slight build, but looked like someone you wouldn't want to tangle with. A super friendly guy, he brought some purple sugar cane for us to sample. It was a sweet treat.

I walked around town a little bit, but didn't buy anything. Mahogany wood carvings were popular with the crew. One guy bought a giant carved spoon and fork. They weren't something I'd hang on my wall. Fireworks were easy to get and some of the guys shot some bottle rockets out over the bay.

I'm sure I'm not being fair to Taiwan. If it had been our first stop, I might have been more impressed. But, the lure of the exotic had pretty much worn off by this time. And, I'm also pretty sure we weren't exposed to the best it had to offer.

Philippines

We stopped at Subic Bay Naval base on the island of Luzon in the Philippines for supplies and a short rest. The weather was miserable, hot and humid. It was here that I pulled my dumbest trick. Outside the gate of the base was the little town of Olangapo, filled with entertainment for sailors. But, while we were there it was off limits due to a sewage problem. So, there was no leaving the base. What to do? There was a baseball diamond and some of us decided to have a beer game. No one kept score. There were no teams. We just horsed around and drank San Miguel beer. After a couple hours of this, someone suggested we go for a swim in the bay. Why not? So, we changed into trunks and dived in. A couple guys actually dove from the boat's bridge which was some thirty feet above the water. Thankfully, they missed the ballast tanks. I didn't do that, but I did go swimming. And, I've regretted it ever since. Not long after, I developed chronic itchy ears that have never gone away. I've seen several specialists with no results. Gee, maybe it's not wise to swim in water next to a city with a sewage problem.

The next morning at quarters we saw another result of our ball game. Our bow was facing a Navy transport ship, and on its hull was painted “Sunk, USS Diodon.” It didn't take long to determine the guilty parties and they were soon over there with fresh grey paint.

There was a swimming pool on the base, and it was the best place to cool off. I had never jumped off a high board before, but a couple of beers gave me courage. In fact, too much courage. I decided to dive head first and landed funny twisting my back; no damage, but it was sore for a while.

While we were there, the carrier U.S.S. Enterprise docked across the bay. Even from that distance, it looked huge. I did get to go aboard a smaller carrier. I was sent over to pick up some stuff. All I saw was a maze

of passageways and compartments.

The Philippines were as far south as we got. We never reached the equator so there was no goofy initiation ceremony. I did get to see the famous southern cross constellation. It was a let down, just a tiny crooked thing.

We left one crew member in the Philippines. He was walking along the deck without watching where he was going and stepped in an open hatch. He broke something and wasn't fit for duty for a while. I have to say, I was glad to leave. By this time I was getting pretty homesick.

Steel Beach

Hooray, we were heading home! In the Navy, on rare occasions when the sea is calm and the weather nice, they hold what is called a steel beach party. It's a chance to unwind for a bit. Ours was somewhere in the middle of the Pacific Ocean on the way back from Japan. The sun was shining and the sea was glassy smooth. We came to all stop and went topside. Dress was extremely informal.

They broke out a rectangular steel tub with holes in it and set it in an open hatch in the forward deck. With a grill and some charcoal briquets, it became a barbecue pit. The cooks soon had hot dogs and hamburgers on it and we all sat around, stuffed ourselves, and enjoyed the sunshine. Here's a view from the bridge. You can see the rescue buoy on the right that's welded down with straps.

There is one officer in the photo. He's sitting with his legs dangling over the side. That's Ensign Zimmerman, a quiet guy, but really nice. Ensigns had it tough. The senior officers leaned on them. Mr. Zimmerman slept in a rack over a torpedo in the forward torpedo room. I had a better bunk.

After eating, those who wanted to went swimming. I joined them. A man with a rifle was stationed on the bridge to watch for sharks and the bow planes were lowered for a platform. I jumped in and swam out about twenty feet or so. The water was crystal clear and the temperature comfortable. I've always loved swimming in the ocean because the salt water makes you so buoyant. Then I put my face in the water and looked straight down. The sun was almost directly overhead and I saw a bright

circle of light against a very dark background. When I raised my head and looked at the boat, it suddenly seemed very small. Here I was thousands of miles from land in water thousands of feet deep, and who knows what was swimming below me. I might be a tempting bait. It spooked me and I swam lickety split back to the boat.

It was a nice break and soon we were on our way again to good old Hawaii, USA.

Hawaii

Ahh, beautiful Oahu. I was there exactly one day. In the morning, a few of us were sent over to the escape training tank. This was a steel cylinder about 75 feet tall and 20 feet across filled with water. I understand it is still there but has been converted to a different purpose. In the top section was a circular platform. There were about five of us and an instructor.

Wearing swimming trunks, we climbed up an external steel stairway to a small compartment on the side of the tank that was fifty feet below the surface of the water. It was a snug fit inside. After some instruction we put clear plastic hoods over our heads with straps under our arms. Then, the instructor flooded the compartment up to our necks and equalized the pressure with the inside of the tank. When that was done, he opened a small door into the tank. Inside, was a line going all the way to the top. One by one we climbed inside and put our arms around the line. The hoods kept an air bubble around our heads. We had been told to continuously yell Ho Ho Ho as we rose to the surface. This is critical, because the air in your lungs expands as you rise. Holding your breath could be fatal. There were divers stationed at intervals in the tank, and if they didn't see a steady stream of bubbles they would grab and stop you. It really was an easy thing to do and we all made it OK.

After lunch, a buddy and I took a bus into town. Our first stop was Waikiki beach. I have to say it was a let down. I'm used to the broad beaches of Southern California. Waikiki is just a skinny little strip of sand with skyscrapers bumping up against it. But, the water was clear and blue.

We wandered around and came across a bar that advertised topless waitresses. So, of course we had to go in. Topless bars were kind of a thing at that time. We took a table and were waited on by a gorgeous statuesque blonde wearing pasties with tassels. We each ordered a beer and enjoyed the scenery. The beers were a dollar, which was kind of high, but the show was worth it.

Then we walked to a seedy part of downtown Honolulu. There was a bar with a sign that said topless dancing, so we went in. It was pretty big inside and packed with servicemen sitting at little round tables. Beer was a dollar here too, but it came in the tiniest beer bottles I've ever seen. On both sides of the place there were cages hung on the walls. And, in each of these was an ugly go-go dancer. It made you want to avert your eyes. I'm sure these ladies were wonderful people, but they really should have chosen another profession. When we left, I walked around town a bit and caught a bus back to the boat. My buddy stayed behind. I don't know what he did the rest of that evening.

So that was it for Hawaii. My general impression of the place was that it reminded me very much of Orange County, what with the traffic and hills in the background.

Home again

We didn't tie up at Ballast Point when we came in. Instead we went a little farther up the bay past the base to a small pier. Those of us with family waiting got first liberty. Janie and Jeffrey were there as I left the boat. It was so great to see them again. I don't think Jeffrey recognized me. He probably wondered who this strange guy was hugging his Mom. Seven months is a long time when you're two. He had grown a lot.

Before we left Japan, we were told we could bring five bottles of liquor back duty free. It would be stored in the after torpedo room until we got back. So, I bought my five, actually seven, I hid two in my bunk, and turned the five over to be stored. One bottle was an I.W. Harper that was intended for Janie's Dad. When I picked up my box of booze in San Diego, the I.W. Harper had been replaced with cheaper Jim Beam. I didn't make a fuss over it and Janie's Dad got the Jim Beam.

It was back to local ops for the Diodon. One of my last was a special test for the Naval Electronics Lab on Point Loma. They had installed some experimental equipment on the boat. We went out and submerged to test depth of about 400 feet and came to all stop. All unessential machinery was shut down and the crew was told not to move. By using the trim tanks, we hovered there for a long time. It was dead silent. My job was to operate a half inch tape recorder in the after torpedo room. I assume we were listening for something, but I wasn't told what. At any rate, I ran the recorder and heard no more about it.

It wasn't long before it came time for me to say goodbye. I did have mixed feelings. I was eager to get back to civilian life, but I had made

some good friends aboard. Captain Speer gave me a nice letter of commendation, which I still have. So, I guess I did OK. Our chief quartermaster and I sat down in the mess area for my re-enlistment talk. He said “I know there's no way you're going to re-enlist, but we have to do this.” I told him “No problem.” I was offered a $10,000 bonus. That was a lot of money in those days. But, the Navy needed ET's. I didn't have to think twice before saying thanks but no thanks. No amount of money could have kept me in the Navy. Even if I weren't married or had a good job waiting, I wouldn't have re-enlisted. I know a lot of people are happy with a career in the service. Thank goodness. I appreciate them and wish them well. But, I didn't like being in an organization that had that much control over my life. As a final favor I got to keep my ship's liberty card, which would allow me to come and go on any base whenever I felt like it.

I was transferred to the Ballast Point base for a short time and the Diodon went to sea without me. There was not much to do but wait. I spent some of the time just sitting on the rocks watching the waves. I hardly had any duties. One evening I was assigned traffic watch. I sat in a Navy pickup on a side road late one night and watched for speeders, who I was supposed to write up. Fortunately, there were none.

My separation orders came through and I reported to San Diego Naval base for processing. In the entryway of one of the buildings was a full length mirror. And, next to it a life size poster of a sailor in dress blues with shiny shoes and a squared away white hat. I looked at my reflection and at the poster. I'm afraid I came out second best. In fact, most of the sailors I'd known would have come out second best too.

While there I performed my last task for the Navy. I helped swab the floor of the Navy Exchange market one evening. What a bang up way to end my Navy career. On my final day, a group of us were assembled in a conference room and told “If there is anything at all that would make you re-enlist, name it. We'll see what we can do.” I wonder what they would have done if I had said “Make me a chief and give me shore duty in San Diego.” I'll never know. I actually liked San Diego, and considered applying for a job at the Naval Electronics Lab. But, Janie wasn't having any of that. Before leaving, I had to sign a form that I didn't have any health problems. Well, I still had itchy ears, but I didn't want to give them any excuse to hold me over, so I signed it.

To celebrate getting out, we traded our Falcon for a brand new baby blue Ford Mustang with a V8 engine. Then we drove up to Orange and rented a real house with a fireplace and big back yard. The Navy would have moved us, but I didn't want to mess with it and hired a moving

company. I don't know where I got all this cash, but we did it somehow. Maybe I just signed a bunch of papers. The movers managed to break a cheap ceiling light fixture which the landlady wanted to use as an excuse not to give us our security deposit. But, we bought a replacement and got our money.

Back to Civilian Life

I reported to North American Aviation and they sent me to the company doctor to be checked out. He just looked at me and asked “Are you healthy?” I said yes, and I was good to go.

I had to report to a reserve unit to register for my one year standby reserve. The Naval air unit at El Toro was the nearest, so I went there. All I had to do was give them my address and phone number in the remote chance they needed me. Thankfully, they never did.

My secure job at North American lasted four years before I was caught in a mass layoff. But, it turned out OK. I found a position with a nice commercial computer company that lasted the next 30 years.

Diodon was decommissioned in 1971 and sold for scrap in 1972. I read on the internet that Captain Speer left the Navy, went into real estate, and has since passed away. May he rest in peace. He was a good man.

So, did I make the right choice back there in 1961? Since I worked in a defense industry, I could probably have gotten a deferment. I actually worked on Minuteman Missile computer components. But, I would have missed out on my life's biggest adventure. And, in 1967, we bought our house with virtually no money down thanks to the G.I. bill. I also used it to take a few more college evening courses. And, I think it affected my personality. I'm still pretty mild mannered. But, having served those two years did give me more self confidence. I had done things and been places that most people don't get a chance to experience.

As I noted in my dedication, Janie had the roughest part of the deal. But, she dealt with it well, and I'm proud of her for that.

Here's a photo of the shadow box that now hangs in my hobby room. The large patch and the leather name patch are from my dungaree jacket. The background is fabric from that same jacket.

So that's my story. I have to admit, I wrote it mostly for myself. It brought back many memories, and was almost like reliving those days when I was so young. I hope you found it worth your time. If you have any comments, I can be reached at Downeyite@Yahoo.com. If you liked the book, please consider adding a review on Amazon. Thanks for reading it.

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